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STAND PAT







"THERE WAS NO NEED, HOWEVER, OF ANOTHER SHOT."

(See page 36.)

Stand Pat

Or

Poker Stories from the Mississippi

By

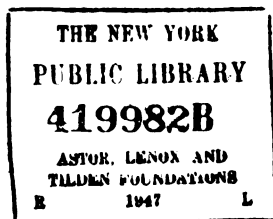
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PREFACE

THE things that I saw, that seemed worthy of note, I have set down without prejudice to the little town of Brownsville, which has grown since I was there. Let no citizen of the place pursue me vindictively because I found him less interesting than Stumpy. And let no one's civic pride suffer because I noted in the town only what seemed to me picturesque. I have no quarrel with Brownsville. I got away from there. What I saw while there seems worth the telling. Much of it I have told in the *Sunday Sun*. That, and more will be found in this book.

DAVID A. CURTIS.



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STAND PAT



I

A NEW POKER DECK

IT was with entire unanimity, though without haste or undue excitement, that the male population of Brownsville emerged from the various buildings on the street when the hoarse whistle of the *Rosa Lee* was heard at about five o'clock one afternoon in June of 1881. The feminine portion of the community was seldom in evidence, but such glimpses as a stranger might enjoy were to be had at the same time, for the women came to their doors and looked out, listlessly, indeed, but with as much interest as they ever displayed in anything short of a fight such as occasionally disturbed the normal quietude of the place.

It was noticeable that the men who came

forth and who made their way toward the landing all paused at the barroom near the wharf. There was ample time to attend to such business as the boat might bring, for she would not arrive for half an hour, at least, and the barroom was handily located for a meeting-place.

No great amount of money had been squandered on the decorations of this particular temple of Bacchus, but such furniture as was deemed essential had been provided, and the main piece of it, outside of the bar itself, was a circular table about four feet in diameter, covered with what had once been green baize. It had suffered long from rough usage, but was still serviceable.

Around this table, as the citizens of Brownsville straggled in, they saw four men sitting with cards in their hands and chips in front of them. One was Long Mike, whose nickname was no mark of disrespect, since he was the richest and most influential man in town, but whose enormous height and general appearance made it

... 9 5 11

impossible to call him anything else, once the nickname was uttered. Wherefore, his surname, if he had one, had been by general consent, forgotten.

Another was Gallagher, his foreman. A third was a man with one eye only, who dealt cards with singular deftness, and was never known to do any manual labour.

And the fourth was a short, but very thick man, usually known as Stumpy, because of his figure. His hair was of a vivid and gorgeous red colour, and he had no quarrel on the ground of nationality with either Gallagher or Long Mike.

The game was not a big one. People seldom played for very large stakes in Brownsville, except on occasions when strangers came to town, when sometimes there would be real gambling, for Long Mike had sporting proclivities, as well as means, and the one-eyed man had never been known to decline any sort of proposition involving a game of chance.

This afternoon they were playing a dime limit, but with as much spirit as if the game

was for blood, and they had just called on Sam, the bartender, for a new deck of cards.

"I'll have time to take in about three more pots," said Long Mike, "afore the boat lands, so I'll make 'em as large as I can," and he opened the jack-pot for the limit.

"Well, ye may take three pots," said Stumpy, who came next, "but I'm thinkin' ye'll not take this wan. Av ye do, ye'll get more than that." And he boosted it the limit.

The one-eyed man said nothing—he never wasted words—but he put up thirty cents.

"Here's where I get a chanst o' pickin' up money," said Gallagher, who was dealing. And he put up forty cents.

"Once more," said Long Mike. And he raised again.

"As often as ye like," said Stumpy, and his forty cents went in promptly.

The one-eyed man also raised it, and Gallagher fairly whooped with joy at the

opportunity he had to make it ten more to play.

"I reckon it's no good givin' yez b'yes good advice," said Long Mike as it came his turn again. "The best thing I can do for yez'll be to take your money. Yez may learn that way, when to lay down." And once more he raised it the limit.

"It's all right y' are," said Stumpy. "Sure it's downright dishonest to be lettin' thim play funder. Let's kape thim out." And he raised again.

But the others wouldn't be kept out. The one-eyed man raised, and Gallagher, getting his turn again, said:

"I'll give yez all warnin'. I'll raise this pot ivery toime it cooms to me. Kape on now. Ruin yersel's av ye loike." And his money went in with a bang.

Long Mike looked puzzled.

"Sure yez ahl must have straights or flushes or such trash, an' guns wudn't kape yez out. Wudn't it be best to take off the limit? We're losin' time this way and th' boat'll be in soon. What d' yez say?"

"That'd suit me fine," said Stumpy. "I have yez all bated a mile, an' the sooner I get th' money the bettther for me."

"Take it off," said the one-eyed man, and Gallagher, who had been growing more and more excited, declared that his pile would go on his hand in one bet.

"Well," said Long Mike, "it's five dollars more I'll make it." And he put up the money.

"I have siventeen dollars an' fifty cents here," said Stumpy, producing an old wallet and counting out the bills. The odd half-dollar he fished out of his pocket, and placing the whole amount in the middle of the table, together with a few chips that he still had left, he said: "That's my pile. Av yez want to see my hand, ye'll match thot."

The one-eyed man was as quiet as ever, but he carefully counted out the equivalent of Stumpy's bet, and added ten dollars to it, shoving the entire sum into the pot.

Not even at that was Gallagher daunted, but after exploring his pockets carefully he declared he was all in with about twelve dol-

lars. He made bigger wages than Stumpy, but spent his money more freely.

Long Mike said nothing until he had carefully portioned out the pot, putting the share in which Gallagher had an interest in one pile, and that which Stumpy expected to win in another. Then he made good, up to the amount of the one-eyed man's wager, and raised him twenty dollars.

That worthy appeared entirely undisturbed. All the chips on the table were already in the pot, and he produced a small roll of bills from an inside pocket which he proceeded to count. Finding some sixty dollars in it, he threw it all on the table.

Long Mike covered it, and raised one hundred dollars.

"Well," said the one-eyed man, "I reckon that will be about enough till after the draw," and he made good.

"How many?" said Gallagher, as he picked up the deck.

"Well, ye moight give me wan," said Long Mike, with ostentatious indifference.

And when Gallagher dealt it to him, he let it lie face down.

"These'll do me," said Stumpy, and it was observable that the ring of confidence was lacking in the tone of his voice.

The one-eyed man skinned his cards carefully before calling for any, and for just one instant an expression of bewilderment might have been noted on his face, but after a moment's hesitation he also called for one card.

As a matter of fact he had discovered that two of his queens were clubs, but he had quickly resolved to say nothing and trust to the chance of the others not noticing it.

"Well," said Gallagher, "I'll take wan messilf, just to kape yez company," and he dealt himself one.

"It's your bet," he said to Long Mike, who then picked up the card he had drawn.

When he saw it his eyes seemed to bulge out suddenly, and his mouth opened wide with astonishment.

"Pfwat the divill!" he exclaimed, and then he burst out laughing so loudly that no one paid any attention to the toot-toot-

toot of the *Rosa Lee's* whistle, which, had they heard it, would have told them that the boat was approaching the landing.

The others looked in wonder while he laughed — all but the one-eyed man, who seemed to have an inkling of the truth, and he grinned, though rather sorrowfully, as if he thought of the money he had felt sure of winning.

“Well, b’yes, yez can’t bate that hand, anyhow,” said Long Mike as soon as he could speak, and he threw down five aces.

They all stared — Stumpy the hardest of all. Then he joined in the laugh.

“Sure there do be aces to burn in thot pack,” he said. “I have two of thim me own silf, wid three kings.” And he showed them down.

“Sure I have you bate, anyhow,” said Gallagher, who was as surprised as any one else, but who seemed to cherish the idea of winning something, somehow. “I have four jacks,” and he showed them, but they were all red.

“Let’s have a look at the deck,” said the

one-eyed man, and he spread the cards out, face up.

A most surprising number of face cards remained, despite the eleven that had been distributed in the deal, and there was a conspicuous absence of small cards.

"Wat sort of a divil's game is this, I don't know?" asked Stumpy.

The one-eyed man picked up the case that had held the deck, from the corner where it had been thrown, and read the word "Pin-ochle" on it.

"It's a game the Dutchmen play in the East," he said. "I've heard of it, but I've never seen it played. But it does give a man good poker hands, doesn't it?"

There was nothing to do but divide the pot, and by the time each man had drawn down his money the *Rosa Lee* was screeching a continuous toot for rousters to catch her lines, and the barroom was quickly emptied.



II

THREE KINGS

AFTER the river was frozen up and the boats could no longer ply the upper Mississippi, the only approach to Brownsville from the other river towns was by the stage-sleigh that came from La Crosse. This crossed three times a week each way, and occasionally brought some stranger to the town, though why a stranger should come, unless he arrived on a boat that would presently carry him farther along on his way, was a thing Brownsville could not readily understand.

It was therefore with mild surprise that the citizens of the place saw one Jack Britton jump out of the low box sleigh one evening in the middle of winter. Nothing was said to him when he alighted. It was not

Brownsville's way to greet newcomers with enthusiasm.

But such of the citizens as happened to be near lined up expectantly in front of Sam's bar, when Mr. Britton, after stamping his feet a few times, and thrashing his arms across his chest to get his blood in circulation, entered the barroom and walked over to the stove to warm his fingers.

After he had stood there for a few minutes, and had, presumably, recovered from the chill of the long ride, he stepped up to the bar and called for some whiskey. His manner was that of a man who is immersed in thought, and for the moment he seemed not to observe that there were others present.

Sam produced a bottle and a glass and set them on the bar, and Mr. Britton poured out a drink for a grown man. He did not know it, or it seemed as if he did not, but the eyes of the community were fixed upon him.

That is, eyes belonging to some eight or nine representative citizens of Brownsville were so fixed, and for one critical moment

there appeared to be a strong probability that Mr. Britton would fail to establish himself on any footing which would entitle him to favourable consideration.

In some mysterious way he became aware of this without anything being said. Being, as he was, the focus of eight distinct glares of surprise, he became aware that something was wrong, and, pausing in the very act of lifting his glass, he looked slowly around, and then said, heartily enough:

"Excuse me, gentlemen. Won't you join me?"

They would and they did, and it remained possible for Mr. Britton to make a good impression. The mere fact that he was unusual would not, of itself, damn him hopelessly, but the curious behaviour of a man who would come so near a fatal breach of etiquette in apparent unconsciousness, was enough to raise a doubt, and while the doubt remained Brownsville was not likely to make overtures.

Jim Bixby, the stage-driver, had swallowed his liquor and gone outside to attend

to his horses, and, after an interchange of glances among some of the others in the room, Larry Hennessy slouched out through the door and was lost to sight.

Making his way to the stable, where Bixby was rubbing his horses down, he stood for a few moments looking on. Presently he said:

"Thot mon inside, yonder. Is he a La Crosse man, I don't know?"

Bixby finished with one horse and began on the other before he answered. Then he said:

"He's on'y been around f'r about a week. Come f'm somewheres East. Been playin' cards a good bit in Russell's place. Left kind o' sudden. Didn't hear much about it, but they was some kind of a mix-up in a game last night. Didn't have nothin' to say comin' over."

This marvel of succinctness being duly absorbed by Hennessy and reported to the community in a much enlarged form, was sufficient to prepare Brownsville for the campaign which Mr. Jack Britton entered upon forthwith.

Having once shaken off the preoccupied and abstracted air which he wore when he arrived in town, he developed into a jovial, free-handed man of convivial tendencies, though sparing in his own consumption of Sam's liquor, and was accepted readily enough as a nomad whose occupation was that of a professional gambler.

It might have been supposed, because of certain previous experiences, that Brownsville would be reluctant to afford Mr. Britton an opportunity to exercise his skill, but Brownsville, in some respects, was like the rest of the world, and Long Mike and McCarthy were both resident in the place.

"Sure, I do be thinkin' that McCarthy can play more poker an' win less money than any other mon in Iowa," said Stumpy, when he came into the barroom that night and found a game in progress, as he had, indeed, shrewdly suspected would be the case.

Long Mike was also in the game, but Long Mike sometimes won, having remarkable streaks of luck, such as McCarthy never seemed to get. And the one-eyed man was

playing, too, so that there was really no reason to suppose that the stranger was the only man at the table who understood all the tricks of the game.

Hennessy had bought a stack of chips, and even Stumpy, though he was a prudent man usually, was soon interested enough to ask for a hand. As there was no objection, he took the sixth seat.

It cost him only five dollars for a stack, and as the game was table stakes, there was a chance for him either to go broke speedily, or to win considerable money. At first, it seemed likely that he might do the latter, for the very first hand he picked up had three kings.

Long Mike was dealing and it was Hennessy's age, so Stumpy had first say, he having sat down between Hennessy and McCarthy.

"I'll play," he said, throwing in his red chip with the two whites that Hennessy had put up for an ante.

McCarthy played also. It was to be expected that he would, for it was as hard for

him to stay out as it was to win. The one-eyed man came in, Britton raised it, and Long Mike and Hennessy laid down.

"Sure I'll raise that," said Stumpy, making it one dollar more.

McCarthy swore, but even his optimism was not enough to induce him to see a double raise on two nines, and he threw down his cards. The one-eyed man and Britton both made good, however, and they called for cards.

Stumpy took two, which proved to be a small pair. The one-eyed man took one, and Britton stood pat.

Stumpy threw in a white chip, being sure of a raise, but the one-eyed man dropped. He had not bettered his two pairs. Britton raised it one dollar, and Stumpy pushed all his chips forward. A king full seemed worth backing, and, when Britton called, he showed them down triumphantly.

"Give me another stack," was all that Britton said as he threw down his cards.

It may have been part of his plan to lose at first, and in any case the loss was not heavy

enough to daunt him, but he smiled as cheerfully as if he had won.

There was no play on Hennessy's deal, and a jack-pot was made. Stumpy dealt next and caught three kings again.

No one opened until it came to him and he put up the size of the pot, hardly expecting any stayers. Britton, however, came in, taking a chance on a red and a black eight, and Long Mike decided to speculate on a four flush.

Neither of them bettered, and Stumpy showed his kings and took the pot.

"Lucky cards," said Britton, and no other comment was made.

Again there was no play and another jack-pot was made. It was not opened for two deals, but when the cards came to Long Mike in turn, Stumpy was fairly amazed to find that once more he had three kings.

It did not look right, and if it had been Britton's deal he would have hesitated about playing them, but Long Mike was above suspicion, so he opened the pot with cheerful confidence.

Again Britton was among those who came in, McCarthy and Long Mike both finding enough to justify a play, but they all took three excepting Stumpy, and he was quite easy in his mind when he bet two dollars. Britton was the only one to call, and he said, with a laugh:

"I've a notion to raise you, but maybe you have them three kings again."

"I have," said Stumpy, and scooped the pot again.

They all stared, but Britton was the only one to speak.

"If I was you," he said, in a nasty way, "I wouldn't play them kings so frequent. You might get beat on 'em next."

Now there are men to whom a remark of this sort may be made without immediate trouble, but such men are not Irishmen of the peculiar redness as to hair and beard that Stumpy had. He flared in an instant.

"Oi'll play thim cards whiniver Oi do be gettin' thim to play," he said, with great heat. "An' if ony gintleman i' th' room, f'm La Crosse or any other place, has any-

thing to say, Oi'd loike t' hear what it is."

"Oh, well," said Britton, "I said what I had to say. It don't look well for any man to hold three kings all the time."

"Av it's a question o' looks," said Stumpy, very coolly, but with evident wrath, "Oi don't loike th' looks o' that nose you do be carryin' round wid youse."

Britton looked around, but seeing that no one else at the table was likely to side with him in case of trouble, he controlled himself with an effort.

"'Tain't as good-lookin' as I'd like to have it," he said, with a forced laugh, "but it's the only one —"

"An' Oi do be thinkin'," interrupted Stumpy, "it ud look a dom sight betther av it was longer."

"Perhaps it would," said Britton, still reluctant to accept the quarrel, "but —"

"But nothin'," shouted Stumpy, reaching over and grasping the feature he had mentioned. "Maybe pullin' it a little moight

do it good." And he gave it a mighty tweak.

Two things only were possible after that, in Brownsville, and unfortunately for Mr. Britton he chose the wrong one. A stand-up fight with nature's weapons would have established him as a person worthy of consideration, even though he had been well licked, but he was not in the habit of fighting in that fashion, and he reached for his gun.

It was an unlucky movement. Long Mike sat next to him, and as they all rose to their feet in the excitement, the big man seized him by the wrist and the neck, and shaking him as a dog shakes a rat, he exclaimed:

"Ye'll pull no gun in Brownsville, ye double-jointed spalpeen, ye. An' ye'll understhand that any gintlemon in this town that wants to play kings, can play as many as he loikes, an' as often as he loikes. An' the loikes o' yez can get back to La Crosse whin ye loike."

And after he had shaken Britton sufficiently, he threw him into the corner of the room.

When the stage-sleigh was well out on the frozen river surface next day, Jim Bixby turned to his passenger and said, briefly:

“Them fellers in Brownsville kind o’ stands by each other most generally.”

But the passenger made no reply.

III

FINISH OF THE ONE - EYED MAN

THE one-eyed man sat playing solitaire at a table in the extreme rear of the barroom. This particular room was not the only place in Brownsville where liquor could be had by those bibulously inclined, for whiskey was recognized as one of the staples. There were few of the citizens of the place who allowed themselves to remain destitute of a domestic supply, and there was none so inhospitable as to refuse to share what he had with even a casual passer-by who cared to stop, but the room in which the one-eyed man sat, on this occasion, was known as the barroom. Brownsville was too small a place to encourage competition unduly.

There was the usual crowd in the room, it being early in the evening, and a river boat being expected soon. It was not every

time a boat arrived that anybody came ashore to stay, but sometimes it happened that somebody would do so, and, even if it didn't, there was usually some freight to be landed, and while the roustabouts were bringing that off, the boat would have to stay.

On such occasions, the barroom, being handy to the landing, became not only the social centre of Brownsville, but also the news exchange where all the available intelligence of the happenings of the outside world was to be obtained. It was not that Brownsville cared specially what the outside happenings might be, or might not be, but there was more or less excitement to be had by conversing with strangers who might stroll ashore for even a few minutes, and Brownsville craved excitement.

The usual crowd was unusually noisy this evening. Long Mike, the labour contractor, who had organized a trust in handling of freight, and owned eight mules, representing a goodly proportion of his accumulated capital, had been drinking more than usual ever since the landing of the last boat, and, after

his fashion when he drank, his voice was being overworked. Moreover, the small crowd of able-bodied men who were enjoying his hospitality had all of them opinions of their own which they were anxious to express, and so, though Sam, the bartender, was a man of few words, there was no lack of conversation.

The one-eyed man did not drink, and as there was an ill-defined popular prejudice against him, partly for that reason, no one paid much attention to him, or to his game of solitaire.

Suddenly somebody called Long Mike a liar. Opinions differed when the matter was afterward discussed, as to who the person was. Some of them said it was Stumpy, but the only reason why they thought so, as they were obliged to admit when the statement was questioned, was that Stumpy was Irish and also red-headed, and a red-headed Irishman was always liable to make a bad break. Others thought that Gallagher had spoken the word, and this seemed more probable, for Gallagher was of a morose temper at

best, and utterly reckless when in his cups. But Gallagher denied it, and nobody excepting the man who spoke ever knew who it was that uttered the word. Several persons were talking at the time, but there was no doubt that somebody exclaimed, "You're a liar!"

At the word the one-eyed man disappeared under the table at which he had been playing. Had the door been nearer to him, or had there been a window in the rear of the room, there is little doubt that he would have gone outside, but the door was the only available exit, and it would have taken two or three seconds for him to reach that. Two or three seconds form an appreciable interval of time.

The tendency of most persons to shoot too high, rather than too low, is well known to everybody who has had experience in such matters, and the course of action pursued by the one-eyed man in getting under the table is the one generally approved. He never carried a gun himself, and moreover, while he did not distinctly approve of the use

of the expression that had been applied to Long Mike, he had sufficient sympathy with the thought expressed to restrain him from any impulse toward resenting it on Mike's behalf.

The fusilade, though it was furious, was brief. Five revolvers were emptied, and as three of them were seven-shooters, while the other two had only five chambers each, it was readily reckoned up that thirty-one shots were fired. Considering the size of the room, which was not great, and the fact that there were fifteen or sixteen persons present, it seemed a little remarkable that no one was hurt, but after the first volley Sam came out from behind the bar and interfered gently, but firmly, with Long Mike, who was trying in a fumbling sort of way to reload his pistol.

"Put that away," said Sam, "or I'll brain you where you stand."

Long Mike looked at him and then at the bung-starter which he held poised ready for use, and forthwith put his pistol back in his pocket. Being unable, in the confusion of words which followed, to determine who

it was that had insulted him, he burst out crying and invited all hands to drink at his expense.

There was a prompt response to the invitation by everybody but the one-eyed man, who had resumed his game of solitaire, and Sam was juggling his glasses with his usual skill when the whistle of the *Rosa Lee* was heard from the river. Three minutes later Sam and the one-eyed man were alone in the room.

"The boys is pretty lively to-night," said Sam, but the one-eyed man only grunted.


"I heer'd Jim Wharton was comin' down the river this week," said Sam, cheerfully insistent upon conversation. "'Twouldn't be none surprisin' if he was on the *Rosa Lee*."

The one-eyed man grunted again, but his eye gleamed, and after a moment he said, slowly: "Well, he'll find me ready for him." But he kept on playing solitaire as if he had no active interest in anything outside of his game.

Neither did he seem to be paying attention to any outside happening, when, after

the noise of considerable confusion outdoors, the crowd came straggling back into the bar-room. It was not the same crowd, for the *Rosa Lee* had brought a considerable load of freight, and Long Mike, though insufficiently sober to bear himself with dignity in social affairs, was not too drunk to attend to business, and he remained outside attending to it. Several of his men, who had been with him in the barroom on terms of equality, were now working for dear life while he stood talking to them with all the emphasis of an army teamster addressing a balky span of mules.

There were several strangers in the incoming party, though, and the room was even more crowded than before. The boat was not likely to start again for an hour or more, and a number of passengers were stretching their legs. Among the newcomers was a tall, swarthy fellow who swaggered like a lumberman, but was dressed like a dandy, and who looked around as he entered as if in search of some familiar face. With him were three others, as well dressed as he,



but all of them having the indescribable appearance and manner which marked them as "professional sports"—in other words, gamblers—and all being of the type that was common along the Mississippi River years ago.

The one-eyed man did not look up, but he showed no mark of surprise when the tall stranger, having first called for a bottle of wine, which he shared with his three companions, left them standing at the bar and strolled over toward the card-table.

"Howd'ye, George," he said, quietly enough, but with a curious suggestion of inquiry in his tone.

"Howd'ye, Jim," was the one-eyed man's response.

He did not even look up from his game, and so far as his voice or manner indicated, he was utterly indifferent to the fact of the other man's presence. He kept on laying down the cards with no show of emotion of any kind, but a close observer might have noticed that he made two mistakes in his play during the short while that the other stood

looking on in silence. Presumably the other was a close observer. Gamblers mostly are.

Presently the newcomer spoke again:

"Bygones is bygones, ain't they, George?" he said.

"Yes," said the player, for the first time looking straight at his questioner, and speaking very slowly. "Yes, I reckon bygones is bygones. Anyway, my eye is gone."

"Well, it was a fair fight, George?" said the tall man.

"Yes, it was a fair enough fight," said the one-eyed man. "If it hadn't been, I'd ha' looked you up an' killed you, 'fore now."

"So I reckon," said Wharton; "you was always quick for a fight, George, an' I don't remember as I ever shirked one that was coming my way, did I?"

"No, that's right enough," said the one-eyed man, indifferently. Then there was another silence and the one-eyed man resumed his game. Presently Wharton spoke again.

"Well," he said, "I reckon there's no grudge between us on account of the fight."

You talk fair enough, an' I hain't nothin' to say, but there's another thing that ain't settled. What do you say to that?"

"What is it?" asked the one-eyed man, shortly.

"There's a matter o' seven hundred dollars o' mine that you got away with in that last game. I called your play crooked an' I couldn't prove it, so I don't hold it against you that you pulled a knife, but I want that money. I hain't fool enough to think you're goin' to hand it over, but I'll play you a freeze-out for one thousand dollars right now. If I lose, I'll take back what I said an' couldn't prove. If I win I'm satisfied. But God help you if you don't play straight an' I do catch you."

"That kind o' talk is cheap," said the one-eyed man, contemptuously. "I don't reckon the Almighty's goin' to help anybody much if he's caught cheatin' along the Mississippi River, but you can say your prayers now, Jim Wharton, if you think o' makin' any breaks at me, like you did once. I'll play you the freeze-out, an' what's more, I'll win

your money unless you've learned to play poker since I seen you last. If it's play, I'll play you, an' if it's fight, I'll fight you to the finish."

Neither man had raised his voice; they were too much in earnest for that. So no one in the room had seemed to pay attention to them. When the one-eyed man called to Sam, however, to bring him cards and chips for the game, a number of bystanders came up to look on, and among them were the three men who came in with Wharton. A looker-on might have thought that they were expecting an invitation to join the game, but none was given, and they said nothing.

The chips were counted out, the two thousand dollars placed in Sam's hands as payment, and the new deck of cards ripped open and shuffled, and the two men cut for the deal, which fell to Wharton.

It was a fruitless deal, for, finding nothing in his hand, he threw in a red chip to cover the two white ones that the one-eyed man had anted, and declared a jack-pot. The one-eyed man made good and took the cards.

As he shuffled and dealt them, the other watched him keenly, but evidently saw nothing wrong, though it was impossible not to see, from the way his fingers moved, that he was dexterous to a degree in their use.

In four or five hands neither man held openers. Then Wharton caught aces, opened the pot, and took it down, the one-eyed man having nothing.

"Your first pot. It's a bad sign for you, Jim," he said, jeeringly.

"All right," said Wharton, "I'll take all the pots that come. The first is as good as any."

But for the next twenty minutes it almost seemed that the superstition was to be upheld. Wharton won no more, and the one-eyed man was four hundred dollars ahead when there came a struggle on Wharton's deal.

Catching two pairs, he made it ten dollars to play, and the one-eyed man promptly raised it ten. Wharton made good and the one-eyed man drew two cards.

It was evident enough that he had threes,

having raised back before the draw, so Wharton, instead of standing pat, as he had thought of doing, took one. It proved to be a jack to his jacks up, and, as afterward appeared, the one-eyed man got a pair with his three sevens.

It was Wharton's bet and he put up a hundred dollars.

"As much more as you have," said the one-eyed man, pushing his blue chips forward.

"I call 'you,'" said Wharton, and they counted the piles. Wharton had almost six hundred left, so the show-down put him ahead in the game.

"Good dealing," said the one-eyed man, coolly, as he picked up the deck, but Wharton made no answer. Instead, he watched the deal more narrowly than ever. Something he saw seemed to interest him greatly.

The one-eyed man bet after the draw, but Wharton refused to see him, and he scooped the pot. Then Wharton took the cards.

Running them over rapidly, face down, he threw three cards to one side. Then, pick-

ing up the three, he examined their backs carefully and exclaimed with an oath: "By the marks on them I reckon they're all alike. Maybe they're aces."

It was done as quickly as lightning flashes, and he threw down the three cards, face up, before any one had fairly realized what he was doing. They were all aces.

Both men sprang to their feet on the instant, and as they rose Wharton drew a revolver and the one-eyed man a knife.

The revolver spoke as the man with the knife rushed around the table, and, with a yell, he stumbled forward, stabbing viciously at the other as he fell on the floor. Wharton dodged quickly, but not quickly enough to avoid a bad cut in the arm, and shifting his pistol to his left hand, he stood ready to shoot again.

There was no need, however, of another shot.



IV

LOOKING FOR GALLAGHER

BROWNSVILLE was disturbed. It can hardly be said that the industries of the place were interrupted, for there were no industries in Brownsville that were liable to interruption, except at such times as one of the river steamboats was lying at the levee, either loading or unloading.

Outside of Brownsville the prairie stretched indefinitely to the north, west, and south, and there were persons who cultivated the soil with a minimum of labour and obtained a maximum of results, and so far as planting, harvesting, and marketing the products constituted an industry, these persons were industrious.

Inside the town, people mostly sat around. Except, as aforesaid, when there was a boat at the levee.

To a stranger no visible signs of disturbance would have been apparent. Looking up and down the long street that constituted the main portion of Brownsville, he might have noticed that there were no women to be seen, but the feminine fraction of the population, insignificant in number, was at no time obtrusive.

Such social functions as were in vogue with the female sex consisted mostly of long-range conversations between women who stood, each at her own door, or leaned out, each at her own window. And the subject-matter of these conversations would have been totally devoid of interest to the stranger.

At the moment when the action of this tale was about to begin, there was no sound of conversation, nor appearance of a petticoat. There was, instead, an ominous hush, though the stranger might not have recognized the omen.

It was yet early in the forenoon, and the only interruption to the unwonted silence of the morning had come from a crash in Long




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Mike's house half-way up the street. It was such a noise as might have been made by an angry man who should survey his breakfast-table, and, finding nothing on it to his liking, should upset it with such violence as to send some of the dishes against the walls of the room and others through the front window.

The strained attention of Brownsville had caught no further sound for half an hour, and though at every other door but his and one other, men stood as if prepared for observation or action, as the case might be, they had heard nothing further, nor seen anything.

Suddenly Long Mike's door flew open. What force impelled it cannot be stated positively, but Stumpy, whose house was almost opposite, saw the recumbent figure of a man several feet back from the doorway, where it might have fallen after an energetic kick and a sudden recoil.

Slowly and with evident effort the man arose to his feet, and after some minutes stepped uncertainly forward. Steadying



himself by the lintels, he gazed out, as if dubious of the result of further effort.

Up and down the street he looked for a long time, with as much earnestness as was compatible with a confusion of ideas that seemed to be buzzing around his head, seeking entrance as bees might endeavour to enter a sealed hive.

Presently his eyes fell on the one doorway, not far from his own, where no man stood. The faces he saw at the other doors were all mistily familiar to him, but he gave no sign of recognition, and no man spoke to him. The alert but motionless figures might have been graven images, so far as any emotion could be detected, and they stirred him not.

But the empty doorway fixed his unsteady look. His eye cleared, and with a mighty lurch he sallied forth, saying nothing when he started but gurgitating violently as he strove to arouse his vocal organs to action.

"Mother of Moses!" muttered Stumpy, grimly observant. "He's lookin' for Gallagher. Now if Gallagher was home what



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a broth of a shindy there'd be! Saints be! but it's good he's took a sneak."

Deviously, and with many pauses and new starts, Long Mike made his way toward Gallagher's house. Arriving in front of it he paused, and cleared his throat with a yell, the like of which Brownsville had never heard, save from the exhaust-pipe of some steamboat.

Following this came a monstrous cataract of vituperation, Homeric in strength, Gargantuan in explicit epithets, shameless in profanity, and seemingly endless in continuance, but bibulously uncertain as to its exact purport. The general tenor of it seemed to indicate a strong desire for a personal encounter with one Gallagher.

When, after a long period of this, silence ensued, Long Mike waited for awhile, but no answer came. The door remained closed, and no sign of life came from within. Standing forward at length, he raised his foot, and Gallagher's door flew in.

"Glory be!" muttered Stumpy again, "it's little use he has for latches and locks



the mornin'. And it's little good Gallagher'll get of his furniture from now."

This last statement was undeniably true, for Long Mike, finding no living being in the house, seized a chair and painstakingly demolished everything destructible on the premises. Then he came out, and after whooping wildly a few times at the uttermost pitch of his powerful voice, made his way slowly and crookedly to the barroom. And after him, one by one, the heads of the households in Brownsville came slowly.

Now Gallagher, as all Brownsville knew, was Long Mike's foreman, and Long Mike's ownership of all the mules in Brownsville was hardly more absolute than his proprietorship in all the available human labour of the place, and, moreover, the imperious character that had enabled him to conquer his position in the community made him its autocrat.

The reflected glory of such a man, to be enjoyed by one fortunate enough to be his foreman, would be enough for any ordinary person, but Gallagher was not ordinary.



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Debarred by nature from the possibility of attaining the highest eminence, he was still covetous of distinction, and the satisfaction he derived from the hearty hatred of the men he tyrannized over, was poisoned by the reflection that the good-natured giant who tyrannized over him held him in contempt.

Because of these things there was frequent friction between the two. Gallagher could extract more work from a mule or a man than any one else, and Long Mike valued him accordingly. Nevertheless, there were times when the foreman's unruly tongue would so stir up the temper of his employer as to secure his immediate discharge. Having little confidence in anything that Long Mike said, Gallagher would proceed with his work, serenely indifferent to his dismissal, and would collect his wages as usual at the close of the week.

It had happened, however, that ever since the night when the one-eyed man had suddenly perished in a controversy with one Wharton, which controversy touched on

points of etiquette appertaining to the game of draw-poker, Long Mike had been unable to steady his nerves, despite his persistent efforts to do so by a liberal use of the one specific in which he had faith. Being unusually irritable, therefore, he had resented Gallagher's latest impertinence more bitterly than usual, and, in addition to discharging him, had attempted also to kill him.

This he would undoubtedly have succeeded in doing with his bare hands, for he had the strength of seven men, but, fortunately for the foreman, there was considerable uncertainty in his movements, and his intended victim had eluded him by a quick movement which was continued in a panicky flight. The flight had taken him across the gangplank of the *Pride of the River*, just as the deck-hands were hauling it aboard, and he had gone down the river on the boat, a fact not yet known to his employer.

There was a Mrs. Gallagher, but she had found refuge with a sympathetic neighbour, and took no part in the events of the day.

In the barroom there was an atmosphere



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of doubtful expectancy. Just what Long Mike would do when he found his rage balked in the direction of Gallagher, no one could tell, and in truth none was anxious to see. The consequences of any fresh accession of fury might be decidedly unpleasant.

It was therefore with considerable anxiety that the crowd listened for Sam's answer, Sam being the bartender, when Long Mike questioned him.

"Where is that man Gallagher?" he demanded, thickly.

"I'm lookin' for him every minute," said Sam, in a matter-of-fact way, as he placed bottles and glasses on the bar. No order had been given, but Long Mike's ways were known, and a round of drinks at his expense seemed to be an appropriate ceremony.

The due performance of this engrossed the general attention for a few minutes, and then Long Mike again demanded to know where Gallagher was.

"I'm lookin' for him every minute," said Sam in the same tone as before. And to the

same question, repeated at irregular intervals for the next quarter of an hour, he replied in the same words.

After each answer Long Mike stood, apparently satisfied, looking as steadily as he was able to do toward the door, with the evident expectation of seeing his foe appear, but abstaining from speech. Slowly, however, he seemed to gather the idea that he was being trifled with, and presently he said, with a violent hiccough:

"Where is that man Gallagher?"

"I'm lookin' for him every minute," said Sam, imperturbably.

Long Mike turned and look at him with a scowl.

"Ye said that before," he exclaimed.

"I was lookin' for him before," said Sam.

This seemed to divert the big man's mind to a new channel of thought, and he pondered it awhile, uncertain whether to laugh or be angry.

At length he leaned over the bar and shook a huge forefinger in Sam's face.

"You're a fool," he said, and glared.



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Sam made no reply, but Stumpy, judging that something must be done, interposed:

"Ye'll all have a drink with me," he said.

Ordinarily this form of speech was unchallenged by any critic in Brownsville, and Long Mike was possibly the one citizen least likely to offer any objection, but on this occasion he turned to the speaker, and, shaking his forefinger at him, exclaimed again:

"You're a fool."

Stumpy stepped back a little. Long Mike faced the crowd and said with additional emphasis:

"You're all fools." Then he broke out with a roar of fury. "Will ye tell me where is that man Gallagher?" but no man dared make answer.

"In just about a minute, now," said Joe Thorp in an undertone to his nearest neighbour, "there'll be a ten-acre fight in this here barroom if nothin' ain't done to get the old man's mind off'n Gallagher."

"I reckon you're about right," replied Jim Hunnewell, "but there ain't nobody here as cares about fightin' 'cept him. An' when

he's loaded, he'd a heap rather fight than do anything else, 'thouten it's play poker."

"That's the idee," exclaimed Thorp, struck with an inspiration. Then, raising his voice, he continued: "Who'll play a game of poker? Speak up, quick, you chump," he whispered, and Hunnewell spoke.

"I will," he said, eagerly.

"And I," "And I," "And I," said Baxter and Wilson and Cosgrove almost as quickly. They had caught the whispered words, and appreciated the emergency.

"Give us the chips, Sam," called Thorp, bustling toward the card-table in the rear of the room. "Will you take a hand, Mike?" he added, carelessly, as the others followed him with more noise than seemed necessary.

Long Mike considered the matter for a moment, but, finding that he no longer held public attention, he wavered and then said:

"I will."

"It's like picking his pockets," said Cosgrove, with some compunction, as they all



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took their seats. Even in Brownsville the code prohibits playing with a man who is hopelessly drunk if he happens to be your neighbour and friend.

"Isn't it better than to have him kill somebody before he sobers up?" said Thorp, and the argument was sufficient for all of them.

But the picking of Long Mike's pockets did not proceed with any alarming speed. They played the usual game, table stakes, and each man took five dollars in chips at the start. The first pot was a jack.

Cosgrove dealt. Thorp passed. Baxter passed. Wilson opened it for a dollar and a half. Hunnewell threw down. Long Mike raised it two dollars. Cosgrove stayed. Thorp stayed and Wilson stayed.

When they came to draw cards, Thorp took one, Wilson took two, and Long Mike was found to be fast asleep. They roused him with some difficulty, and after scanning his cards with every appearance of dissatisfaction, he called for four. Cosgrove took three.

Wilson bet a white chip. Long Mike chipped. Cosgrove shoved in his pile, having caught a third ace. The others all stayed, and Wilson showed three tens. Thorp had a small straight, and Long Mike had a king-high flush.

It was quick action and called for another jack. As three of the conspirators bought more chips, they consoled themselves as well as they could with the thought that sheer luck like that seldom comes to one player frequently in one sitting.

This time Baxter opened it under the guns. Wilson passed. Hunnewell raised it one dollar on a small straight. Long Mike stayed on a pair of deuces. Cosgrove and Thorp laid down and Baxter saw the raise, having kings up.

In the draw Long Mike caught the three aces Cosgrove had had the deal before. After Baxter and Hunnewell had bought again, there was fifty-five dollars on the table, of which over thirty was in Long Mike's pile.

In the next deal he caught nothing and



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promptly went to sleep again. They woke him up in time to look at his next hand, and that failed also to interest him. In the following deal, however, he caught three sevens.

It had been his ante, and the money had been put up out of his pile without waking him, but even under existing circumstances no one cared to go so far as to play his hand for him, the more especially as they all had pretty good cards and saw his raise when he made it two dollars to play.

Catching the fourth seven in the draw, he made good on two raises that had been made before it came to him, and threw in five dollars more. Thorp and Wilson both called for their piles, one having a flush and the other a full.

Just what might have happened in a few hands more it is impossible to say, for the whistle of the *Prairie Belle* startled the crowd as she steamed up to the levee, and Long Mike staggered to his feet, stuffing his winnings in his pockets as he rose. Neither

whiskey nor poker was potent to hold him when there was business to be done.

As he stepped unsteadily into the open air, Sam heard him asking of the wide, wide world, "Where is that man Gallagher?"



V

STUMPY'S DILEMMA

THE only thing stirring on the levee at Brownsville on Sunday morning, usually, was a small dog belonging to Stumpy. It was of record that when Stumpy arrived at Brownsville with his dog Peter, bringing their entire earthly possessions wrapped in a large red handkerchief, Peter came across the gangplank first, being in hot pursuit of a rat. The rat escaped, finding its way into a crevice near the edge of the water, and the most of Peter's spare time for the two years that had elapsed since then had been spent near that crevice. No sign of the rat had ever been discovered, but Peter's faith was abiding.

It was possibly characteristic of the breed of Peter, which was considered in Brownsville to be some sort of terrier — and it was

certainly characteristic of Peter that he did not sit down by the crevice to watch for that rat, but ran back and forth continually, barking, meanwhile, with cheerful disregard of the effort involved. He did not wag his tail, being possessed of a totally insufficient amount of tail to be wagged. "Sure his tail was never cut off," Stumpy used to say, "it was drove in." But he wagged the entire hinder portion of his body, as he ran, with an enthusiasm that frequently sent two of his legs high in the air.

While he was engaged in this fashion one otherwise peaceful Sabbath day, his master appeared in view, and the two were soon in conversation.

"Thim two spalpeens that kim off the boat last night, I'm thinkin', is goin' to do up the town, I do' know," said Stumpy, whose habit it was to discuss matters with Peter when he found them too difficult to understand easily.

Peter looked at him anxiously, but finding that Stumpy had paused for reflection, he barked once, and waited.

"That's just it," said Stumpy, eagerly.

"The divil's own cousin cudn't tell if they was Mormon missionaries or retail grocers on a holiday trip. If it was down the river, now, they'd be cotton factors maybe, but whhat'd a cotton factor be doin' in Brownsville, I do' know. An' the drink! Glory be, but they're divils for drink. An' Long Mike on'y a week after the last wan."

This last remark called for no explanation in Brownsville, where Long Mike's sprees were events in municipal history. Peter whined lugubriously.

"An' it's right ye are, Peter," said Stumpy. "If he starts in again now there'll be an end. Didn't he wipe out Gallagher's place from door to door, wid the glory o' drink in him, two weeks ago? It's none too peaceful at the best, that Brownsville is, but wid him drunk it's hell. An' it's drunk he'll be again if thim two strangers stays. An' I do be thinkin', Peter, that if he's drunk again afore the change o' the moon, he'll sober up in the life everlastin'."

At this Peter howled long and loud, and Stumpy lapsed into silence.

To them presently appeared Sam. The exigencies of business required Sam's presence in the barroom, as a usual thing, regardless of the day, or time of day, he being the only dispenser of potable necessities in Brownsville, but the stress of Saturday nights was commonly followed by an interval of calm on Sabbath mornings, and his custom was to go abroad for air on those occasions.

Seating himself on a piece of driftwood, he chewed the end of his cigar for a time, and then observed: "It was a large night."

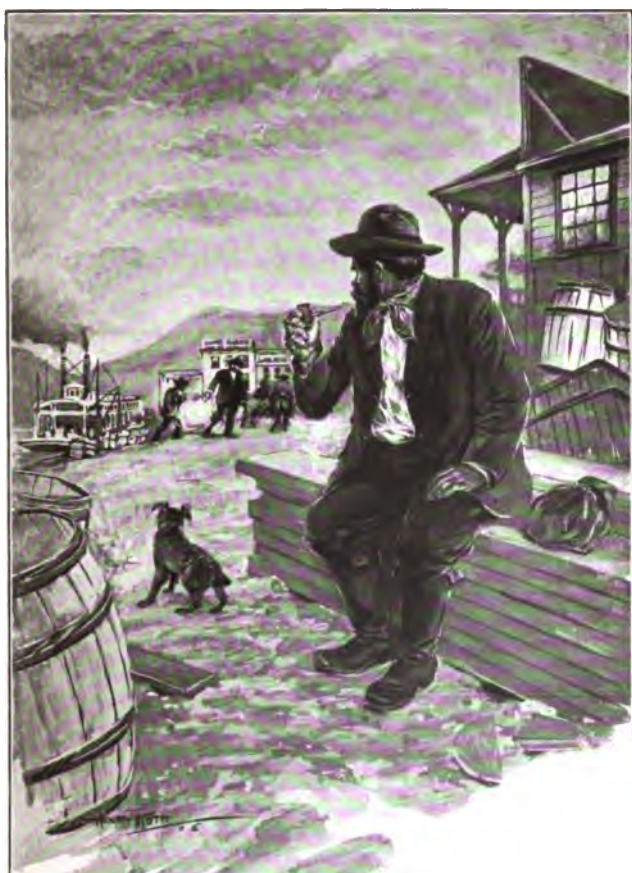
"It was," said Stumpy. "Is thim two strangers stayin' here long, I don't know?" Stumpy's brogue defied spelling.

"They'll be dead if they do," said Sam. "I've saw wild men afore, but I never seen two men try to pull up the Mississippi River by the roots."

"If it was thim 'ud die," said Stumpy, gloomily. "An' Hennessy. We c'd do wid-out Hennessy an' wan or more others. But I do be thinkin' Long Mike is off again."

"Looks like it," said Sam.

Just then the report of a pistol-shot rang



"JUST THEN THE REPORT OF A PISTOL-SHOT RANG OUT."



out, and Peter leaped in the air. He was not hurt, but the bullet had struck between his fore paws, and he was frightened.

Stumpy turned like a flash. The two strangers were approaching, laughing heartily, and one of them was about to shoot again. Stumpy was a small man, probably a foot shorter than either of the newcomers, but his hair was very red. He sprang to his feet.

"That's my dog," he said, pulling off his coat, and the man who was poising his revolver lowered it.

"No offence, friend," he said, pleasantly. "I just wanted to see the dog dance."

"Dance, is it?" shouted Stumpy, in a fine rage. "That dog's no circus. If it's dancin' ye want, I'll dance, but it's on your ugly face it'll be, wid you on the flat o' your back." And he squared off in excellent style.

"There, there," said the big man, soothingly, "I'll not fight you, and I'll not bother your dog, if it's yours. Come and have a drink."

It was not easy to placate the little Irish-

man, but the two strangers finally accomplished it, and the entire party went over to the barroom. Peter, however, refused to enter the place, and showed his teeth viciously when the sportive pistol-player, whose name was Carruthers, offered to pat his head by way of apology.

As the day wore on, the male population of Brownsville, one by one, appeared in the barroom, and Carruthers and his mate, Hopper, played the part of hosts with great assiduity, so that the general condition of hilarity that had prevailed on Saturday night, but which had been greatly modified in the early morning hours, was fully reestablished before nightfall.

The two men told about themselves without reserve, and there seemed to be no reason to doubt their story. They were sports, they said, frankly, it being fully understood that the word sport was a mere euphemism for professional gambler, and, having "made a killing" in La Crosse a few days before, they were enjoying a trip down the river with the ultimate purpose of getting into a

big game at Vicksburg or New Orleans. Things being too slow to suit them on the boat on which they started, they had stopped off at the first landing-place to wait for another. Being thus in Brownsville, they proposed to enjoy themselves as heartily as possible, so what was the matter with all hands having another drink?

Whatever latent prejudice there was in the minds of Stumpy and one or two others who recognized an element of peril in the situation, was of little force against the popular enthusiasm the two strangers evoked by their liberality. Being men of seemingly unlimited capacity themselves, they soon discovered that Brownsville had also a few mighty drinkers, and, while now and again some less gifted man dropped out of the bout and made his uncertain way to some hiding-place, there were others on whom even Sam's brands of red liquors had no appreciable effect.

Long Mike, indeed, seemed in his element. Glass for glass with anybody and everybody he tossed off his tipples as if it were filtered

water, and his eye grew brighter, his hand steadier, and his tongue more nimble with each potation, so that only those who knew the awful cumulative effect drink had on him when his limit was actually reached, could realize that the commercial standing of Brownsville was at stake, for without Long Mike there was no head to the community, and no prospect of carrying on any business of importance. Therefore Stumpy — and others — had misgivings.

Not all the boats that ply the Mississippi stop at Brownsville, and the intervals at which some do stop are uncertain, so that Carruthers and Hopper had no means of calculating the length of their stay. It did not appear to trouble them much, but toward evening, no boat having appeared, and none being expected that night, Carruthers remarked, casually, that he could wish for a little excitement.

“Your liquor is all right,” he said, “and your society here is pleasant enough to suit anybody, but don’t you ever do anything in Brownsville?”

"We had a cock-fight here last month," said Hennessy, "but there's only one cock in town now. That was Gallagher's afore Gallagher lit out, but even if he was to come home there's no way o' fightin' one cock. That is, there's no way I know on, 'thouten you put him front of a lookin'-glass," he added, with a foolish laugh that no one echoed.

"Don't nobody ever play poker here?" asked Hopper.

"I knowed it," said Stumpy, under his breath, to Sam, who nodded understandingly.

People did play poker in Brownsville, quite a number of them, but they had a wholesome respect for travelling sports, realizing that the domestic variety of the game was by no means up to the standard established on the boats by gentlemen who made a business of playing. Liquor, however, played the mischief with Long Mike's bump of caution, and he was fond of poker anyhow.

It turned out as Stumpy feared, and as

Hopper expressed his disdain of a limit game, and nobody else was strong enough to put up a hundred dollars, Long Mike was presently engaged in playing table stakes with the two sports, each of the three having produced that sum.

"It's not the hundred'll break him," said Stumpy, while Sam was getting the chips and cards, "but he'll buy and buy, by and by, till the devil himself couldn't save him."

And this was the prevailing opinion among the score or more of men who clustered around to watch the game. No man, however, cared to raise his voice in protest. It would hardly have been done in any case, for a wholesome respect obtains on the Mississippi River for the right of the individual to go to the devil in his own chosen way, but, in the case of Long Mike, there was an additional feeling that he would make it extremely uncomfortable for any one who might presume to remonstrate with him for anything.

The game was not, at first, a notable one. No particularly sensational play marked the

loss of Long Mike's first hundred, though it went pretty fast, and with the second hundred he managed to secure some good pots, so that he ran up, almost even, for a few moments. But a series of losses reduced his pile again to less than forty dollars, when he caught a flush against Hopper's full house, and called on Sam for two hundred more in chips.

It was evident, then, that he had the fever, and Stumpy groaned in spirit. There was no telling what the end would be, but he felt that it was among the possibilities for Long Mike to ruin himself in an hour or two, and his ruin would be disastrous to more than one in the room.

Suddenly he saw something which set his brain in a whirl. If he could have been positive and could have given proof, he would have declared that he saw Hopper deal himself a card from the bottom of the deck. He knew, however, what the accusation of cheating would mean, and he hesitated. Possibly he might have been mistaken, he thought, and anyhow it would be

his word against one other's. It was altogether uncertain what the result would be.

He watched the game, however, even more keenly than before, determined to speak, regardless of consequences, if he should see anything he was sure of. What he did not notice was that Carruthers had seen the gasp of astonishment that he had himself been unconscious of, and was watching him carefully. He stood opposite where Carruthers sat.

Presently there came a jack-pot that Hopper opened for five dollars. Carruthers passed, but did not immediately throw his cards on the table. Long Mike raised it ten dollars, it being his deal. Hopper came back at him with ten more, and Long Mike stayed.

Hopper called for two cards, and, as he did so, Stumpy distinctly saw Carruthers show Hopper his hand as he threw it on the table in the discard. One of the five was an ace, and Stumpy saw it.

Watching Hopper as he moved to pick up the cards dealt to him in the draw, he

saw further that Hopper took one of them and one from the discarded pile. It was deftly done, but he was certain this time.

Long Mike stood pat, and when Hopper pushed his whole pile forward, Long Mike called him for all he had in front of him, a hundred and odd dollars. Then he showed a pat straight and Hopper showed four aces.

"Hold on!" shouted Stumpy. "There's foul play here. That—" and then he paused.

Every man in the room was looking at him, and he was the only one who saw the muzzle of Carruther's pistol just above the edge of the table. It was pointed directly at him, and the barrel looked to him as large around as a nail-keg.

It was not necessary to explain to him that Carruthers had the drop on him. Moreover, he knew that if he tried to finish his sentence he would be shot before he got the words out. It was small wonder he paused.

Nobody spoke for a moment, Stumpy for the excellent reason just stated, and the others because of their surprise. Then Carruthers

said: "Evidently the gentleman never saw four aces held before. Is that what you meant when you spoke of foul play?"

Still all eyes were on Stumpy. No one else had seen the revolver, but he knew that on his answer depended the question whether Carruthers should shoot or not. Drops of sweat came out on his forehead. He drew a long breath.

Then he saw something else, and he answered Carruthers curiously.

"Yes-s-s," he said, prolonging the word into a curious hiss which he knew that Peter understood.

At the instant that Carruthers, with an evil smile, was relaxing his aim, a small, brown dog landed on his shoulders and fastened his teeth in his throat.

No man was ever able to recall all the details of the mix-up that followed, but after two badly damaged strangers had departed from Brownsville on the next boat, Stumpy observed to Sam: "Sure, it would ha' been better to kill thim, I don't know."



VI

GALLAGHER'S RETURN

WHEN Gallagher came back to Brownsville he did not expect to be met at the steamboat-landing by a delegation of citizens eager to welcome his return. There was no thought in his mind of having to listen to an address of eulogy and being obliged to reply with a few or a great many well-chosen remarks.

The idea of a brass band and a display of fireworks tooting and blazing in his honour had never entered his head. The most he hoped for was to be able to sneak across the gangplank unnoticed, and to make his way under the friendly obscurity of darkness, in case it should happen to be after nightfall, along the edge of the levee to the neighbourhood of his own house, where he might remain in seclusion until such time as he

should learn what the disposition of the community might be, and more especially what Long Mike's attitude toward him was.

The recollection of all the circumstances attending his departure from Brownsville was sufficiently vivid in his mind to fill him with apprehension, and the utmost caution seemed absolutely necessary when he determined to return. He recalled distinctly that, after he had tried Long Mike's temper to the point at which further endurance became impossible, that usually good-natured person became suddenly furious with rage, and not only discharged him from his employ — that, Gallagher was accustomed to — but strove earnestly to preclude the possibility of hiring him again, by the simple but effective expedient of killing him.

It should be said that Long Mike seldom attempted to kill anybody. Murder was not his habit, he being usually a tolerant person, albeit he required a full equivalent of labour in return for the wages he paid.

On such occasions, however, as he had deemed serious enough to demand extreme

action, he had never been known to fail to get his man, until Gallagher had eluded him by a flight that took him far from Brownsville. Some months had elapsed since then, but Gallagher had no means of knowing whether his boss's wrath had cooled or not.

The caution he displayed in eluding observation when he went ashore from the river boat was not, therefore, uncalled for. Knowing the ground perfectly, even in the darkness, he picked his way carefully to the door of his own house, but before lifting the latch he stopped and listened, as one who was in great doubt. As he continued to listen he passed through many phases and degrees of doubt, perplexity, and amazement.

It was his own house beyond a question, but many things had happened since his sudden departure. Long Mike was impetuous, but not devoid of generous impulses, or of a prejudice in favour of fair play. When he realized that he had wrought injustice to Mrs. Gallagher in the fervour of his pursuit of her husband, he had taken effective

and characteristic measures to remedy the wrong.

This was largely due to the personality of Stumpy, whose Irish blood boiled on slight provocation, and who entertained no fear, even of his boss, when he was moved to remonstrate against any happening which failed to comport with his ideas of propriety. Stumpy it was who said:

"Sure, it was a blackguard's thrick to lave Misthress Gallagher widout a bed to lie on, or a shtove or a taable to her back."

"Did Gallagher do that?" demanded Long Mike, indignantly.

"He did not," said Stumpy, "but there's them that did."

"Who did it?" asked Long Mike.

"It was yoursilf," said Stumpy, and stood immediately on the defensive.

The look of blank astonishment that Long Mike gave at the accusation was at least presumptive proof that he did not realize his offence, and seeing it, Stumpy's wrath was somewhat assuaged. It did not right

the wrong, however, and Stumpy wanted that done.

"It was whin ye was lukkin' f'r Gallagher," he explained. "Belike ye was confused wid the rage that was in ye, an' maybe a thrifle o' liquor, too, but ye found his house, an' him not bein' there, by the mercy o' God, ye smashed, and smashed, an' there's nothin' left."

"Did I, now?" said Long Mike, and he chuckled, whereat Stumpy's wrath blazed up again.

"Ye did," he said, briefly, "an' 'twas a blackguard act for to lave a lone woman deshtitoot."

"Aisy now, Stumpy, aisyy now," said Long Mike, good-naturedly. "Av that pirut, Gallagher, has left his woman deshtitoot —"

"'Twas you drove him away," interrupted Stumpy.

"Yis, an' a good job. Av he cooms back, I'll break ivery dommed bone in his body," exclaimed Long Mike, with sudden fury. "But I'll have no woman suffer in Brownsville, Stumpy. Av that dirty pirut lift her

deshtitoot, as ye say, she'll be took care of. Mind that."

Taken care of, she had been, in Brownsville fashion. New furniture had replaced the stuff that Long Mike destroyed, and, as the house contained two rooms, or one more than Mrs. Gallagher required to live in, the sporting element of Brownsville had established the custom of using her extra space for a card-room.

Whenever a game was in progress, the good lady retired to her own apartment, but after the players had departed she always found that the kitty, established for her benefit, remained on the table. And inasmuch as the income she derived from this source was much larger, and no more irregular, than that which she enjoyed from Gallagher, it had come about that she no longer felt any very keen anxiety for his return.

All this was, of course, unknown to Gallagher, as he listened, and his surprise at the unexpected sounds he heard was natural enough.

One Harrison had been in Brownsville

for two or three days, in company with his side partner, Davis, the two being on one of their occasional business trips down the Mississippi Valley. They had been known to play in some of the principal cities, but for the most part they preferred the smaller places, being of the variety of sports commonly known as crossroads gamblers, and Brownsville was one of their favourite stopping-places.

They had at first been inclined to question the use of a private house for their purposes, but after the circumstances were explained, they had acquiesced readily enough, and on this occasion they were sitting in.

Long Mike was there. It would have taken more than one Gatling gun to keep him out of a game when one was in progress and he was in the neighbourhood. McCarthy had a hand also, and Billy Flynn.

McCarthy was a character. He loved the game of poker with a fervour that would have made him a large winner if he could only have learned how to play the game. As it was, he only sat in at such times as

he had sufficient money saved up from his wages to buy a stack. And he never sat long.

Flynn was a good player, and Long Mike was better than the average, but neither of them knew enough of the game to detect the peculiarities of play that gave Harrison and Davis a large percentage in their favour.

They had been playing for half an hour, and only the remnants of his stack remained to McCarthy, when he caught a king full, pat, on Flynn's deal. It was a jack-pot, and Harrison, having first say, opened it for the size of it, which was a dollar and a quarter. The game was a small one.

McCarthy raised it all he had, which was about seven dollars more, and the others all laid down, including the opener, who showed jacks. McCarthy took down his two dollars and a quarter winnings, and proceeded to make the only additional blunder that was possible under the circumstances. He showed his hand and exulted in his winning.

It was nobody's business to instruct him, and the others smiled grimly as Harrison

took the cards to deal. He was impatient at the smallness and the slowness of the game and made ready for a killing.

Shuffling with extra care, he dealt good hands to everybody, making sure of the aces at the bottom of the deck that he could utilize in the draw. It would have been pitiful, had there been anybody there to see, to note the way in which everybody backed his cards, and the fact that Harrison's full of tens on aces scooped the pot.

McCarthy was out of it, and Flynn and Long Mike had to buy again, but they were brave, if foolish, and being well supplied with money, they played on. McCarthy sat by watching. The fascination held him, even though he could play no longer.

Suddenly he saw that which made his eyelids contract and his jaw set itself like a bulldog's. He said nothing at the moment, but watched carefully until it came Harrison's turn to deal again. Then he leaned a little forward and looked a little more intently.

Again it was a jack-pot, and Long Mike

opened it. Davis and Flynn dropped, but Harrison raised it, and Long Mike stayed. When it came to the draw he called for one card, and McCarthy spoke up.

"If it's two pairs ye're drawin' to, you'd better split 'em an' draw three cards," he said, and Long Mike stared at him in amazement.

"An' what for should I do that, I don't know?" he said, but Harrison broke in with an oath and an angry:

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said McCarthy, very distinctly, "that you've stacked the cards and —"

Further than that he did not speak, for Harrison's gun was out and almost in position before McCarthy could grapple him and seize his wrist. At the same moment Flynn grabbed the pistol itself and strove to wrench it from his fingers.

Even with two men holding him, and they were both powerful men, the gambler struggled mightily, and for a moment seemed about to wrench himself free. The three were all over the room.

It was harder to keep Long Mike out of a fight than to drag him away from a bar or poker game. Moreover, though he held McCarthy in contempt as a gambler, he knew him for a man who spoke the truth, and leaping to his feet he started forward.

Davis, however, sprang up at the same instant, and, stretching out his foot, he tripped the big man and threw him headlong on the floor. Drawing a knife from his belt, he threw himself on the prostrate form and raised his arm for a blow. In the excitement nobody noticed that the door had been opened.

"Whurroo!" said Gallagher, and threw himself into the fray.

There was no time to find a weapon, and he carried none, but he was handy with his feet, and a well-directed kick not only lamed Davis's elbow for a week, but knocked the knife from his hand half-way across the room. It would have been between Long Mike's ribs but for the kick. Disarmed and disabled, the desperado was no match for the two men, one of whom was grappling

him from beneath while the other was continuing to kick from above.

At this moment the pistol went off and Gallagher fell to the floor. Flynn had got possession of the weapon, but it had been discharged in the transfer and Gallagher's head was directly in line. Having it, however, Flynn used it promptly and stunned Harrison with a single blow, practically ending the shindy, for Long Mike made short work of Davis when he realized the situation.

"Is he kilt?" he inquired, anxiously, as Flynn and McCarthy bent over Gallagher. "Sure he saved my life when this blackguard was shtickin' me like a pig."

"I think he is," said McCarthy. "There's a hole in his head the size of a shtove door."

But the bullet had glanced, and Gallagher was only stunned. Sitting up a moment later he said:

"Will ye's all get out o' my house? I have confidential affairs to discuss wid Mistrhess Gallagher."

"We will," said the three friends, as they departed, dragging the gamblers with them.

Then the other door opened.

"Is it you, Pat?" said a female voice.

"It is," said Gallagher, "an' I'd like my supper. But first ye'll give me a bit o' a wet rag till I wipe my head."

VII

GALLAGHER STRIPPED

"SURE I do be thinkin' it's like playin' lotthery," said Stumpy, as he sat one day in meditative mood near the steamboat-landing with Deaf Dan. It was a hot afternoon and there had been a long, sociable silence between them when Stumpy yawned and shot off his comparison. It was uttered in stentorian tones, for none could converse otherwise with Deaf Dan.

"As bein' how?" inquired Deaf Dan. "Who's a lotthery?"

"All of us," said Stumpy. "Iv'ry marnin' we do put in, loike the suckers that buys thim little printed bits o' paper wid a big number on 'em, an' lies. An' thin we set around, like bumps on a log, waitin' for to see what the drawin' 'll be, the same as thim same suckers does. Mostly it's blanks. Sil-

dom it is that anythin' happens in Brownsville. But now an' again, some wan'll dhraw a proize. Maybe it's a chanst at th' red liquor, an' maybe it's a shindy, an' sometimes it's a game of dhraw-poker, but annyhow it's a proize, such as it may be."

"It's right y' are," said Deaf Dan. "An' lately it's all blanks. Sure, there's nothin' do be doin' in th' place since the night that Gallagher got back."

"Sure, that was a fine foight," said Stumpy.

"They tell me that same," responded Deaf Dan, "but Gallagher an' — Howly mother o' Moses, phwat's that?"

"That" appeared at first to be a procession of two, emerging with great suddenness from the door of the barroom, but, as Deaf Dan and Stumpy rose to get a better view of the proceedings, the two who first appeared were followed by a straggling crowd of others, all eagerly intent on observation, so that presently the entire male population of Brownsville was assembled on the levee, looking with interest to see the outcome of

what seemed to be a personal difficulty between two prominent citizens. Last of all to appear was Sam, the bartender, whose appearance on his doorstep was indisputable evidence that there was no one remaining inside.

The leading figure in the procession was Gallagher, and judging from the earnestness with which he was moving, it was easily to be understood that he was desirous of putting as much vacant space as possible between himself and the second advancing figure. He might almost be said to be flying, rather than fleeing. And every ounce of force at his command was devoted to the effort to keep in the lead, so that, although his mouth was open, he emitted no sound.

His pursuer, on the other hand, though he was no less resolute in his endeavour to cover the ground quickly, was devoting a part of his strength to the loud utterance of many words. For the most part, these words savoured of profanity, too enthusiastic to be well chosen, but sufficiently impassioned to be exceedingly impressive. There

was no questioning the fact that Long Mike had lost his temper again, and small doubt that he would do bodily harm to his foreman if he should succeed in getting near enough to lay hands upon him.

But Gallagher succeeded, though with great difficulty, in maintaining his position in the van of the advance until he reached the brink of the river. Then, instead of turning, or possibly making a stand, he surprised the onlookers beyond measure by making a flying leap, and disappearing in the muddy flood.

Right here it may be said that no man, with the possible exception of Gallagher or Long Mike himself, was ever able to tell just how it happened that the long-standing difficulty between the two had blazed up in such sudden fury. Opinions differed as to whether Gallagher's intemperate habits of speech had provoked the outburst or whether Long Mike's apprehension had been warped by his indulgence in superfluous stimulant. All that was known was that Long Mike had aimed a sudden blow, which the other had

dodged, and that the foot-race began forthwith.

When the pursued plunged into the river, the pursuer paused on the brink. For a moment it seemed as if he were only waiting for his victim to appear at the surface before leaping in after him, and Stumpy and two or three others laid detaining hands on him. Almost immediately, however, it appeared that he was not minded to risk himself in the water, although his wrath was by no means assuaged, for, after a few moments, Gallagher, who could swim like a fish, reappeared some twenty yards from shore, and, keeping himself easily afloat, turned to his foe. Thereupon, Long Mike, making no effort to break away from the men who held him, opened his mouth and spoke.

"_____," he said.
"_____."

"Is that so?" responded Gallagher, mockingly. He was not devoid of courage, though neither he nor any three men up and

down the river cared to face Long Mike in a rough-and-tumble fight.

"It is," said Long Mike, "an' if ye'll come ashore, I'll break ivery bone in yer body."

"Ye'll not," said Gallagher.

"An' why?" demanded Long Mike.

"Because I'll not come ashore."

Preposterous as this proposition was, Long Mike did not appear to recognize the fact that the other could hardly remain in the water indefinitely, and that all he had to do was to wait. He broke out again in language to which no polite person would willingly listen, and concluded by saying: "I can lick the life out o' yez."

"Ye can," said Gallagher, unhesitatingly.

"An' I can outdhrink yez."

"Ye can that," said Gallagher again.

"An' I can outrun yez."

"Yis."

"An' I can outswear yez, an' — an' — an' — an' I'm a betther man than yez in ivery way," sputtered Long Mike, not seeming to

be able to call to mind any more specific accomplishments.

"Y' are not," said Gallagher. "Whin it comes to dhraw-poker, I'll play ye fer years ag'in minutes, an' bate ye the two-thirds of all eternity."

"Draw-poker, is it?" exclaimed Long Mike. "Av ye'll coom in out o' the wet an' play a freeze-out, I'll win yer money an' yer house an' lot, an' the clo'es off yer back, till yer naked as a bald head, an' worn out as a burnt match."

"I'll go ye," said Gallagher, "f'r all I have, ag'in everything ye have yoursilf."

There was a murmur of dissent and some derisive laughter from the crowd, for Gallagher, though fairly well-to-do according to the Brownsville standard, was the other's employee and by no means a peer of the principal capitalist of the town, who, in addition to his visible resources, had money secreted in his house. But Long Mike raised his hand.

"Let be," he said, sternly. "I have a lesson to tache this omadhaun. Faith, he's

growin' too large to live in the same town wid the likes o' me."

And the unequal match was arranged. In half an hour's time the two were seated in Sam's back room, with all the chips in the house divided in two equal parts, and the game was begun with the clear understanding that the winner of all the chips could claim from the other all that he owned on earth down to his undershirt.

As there was nothing whatever to attract the attention of anybody in Brownsville to any other point, the room was crowded with lookers-on, and all those who could not gain entrance stood outside and discussed the probabilities.

"If Gallagher do play close," said Stumpy, "I'm thinkin' he'll win out, for Long Mike's the divil for bluffin' an' Gallagher knows it, worse luck!" And this was the general sentiment.

In the first half-hour — for the game was one — Long Mike's luck was by no good, and though the big man made at plunges, his pile of chips dwindled

until Gallagher had all but a single stack of blues. Of course, there was no arbitrary money value to a chip, but they called them dollars for convenience, the reds being a quarter and the whites a nickel.

It was Long Mike's deal and Gallagher anted the usual nickel, but the dealer, finding nothing, threw in a blue and took his change from the other, making a ten-cent jack. This was sweetened, a nickel at a time, till there was a dollar in the pot. Then, Gallagher dealing, Long Mike opened it for a dollar.

"I'll raise you two," said Gallagher.

"Five better," said Long Mike, pushing in the chips.

"All you've got," said Gallagher.

"Go you," said Long Mike, and they both stood pat. Each had a flush, but Long Mike's was ace high and Gallagher's best card was a jack.

The next hand was passed and another jack-pot made. Gallagher opened it, was raised, raised back, and was raised again till once more Long Mike's pile was in t'

centre and Gallagher stood to win it all. Again they both stood pat and showed two straights, but Long Mike's was the better. This gave him eighty dollars to play with, but Gallagher still had nearly three hundred, so it took another hand like the last to put the two on anything like even ground.

"If Long Mike wins again," whispered Stumpy to his next neighbour in great excitement, "he's got his luck wid him, an' it's good-bye, Gallagher." His neighbour nodded, and their hopeful faces showed that they shared fully in the general wish that Long Mike would win.

It was with strained attention that the crowd watched the next deal, and a sigh of satisfaction followed the making of another jack-pot. This was sweetened again and again till the spectators lost patience, and Long Mike expressed his poor opinion of the cards violently and called for a new deck.

It was brought and shuffled, and on the next deal both caught openers. Long Mike opened and Gallagher raised, but instead of

raising again, Long Mike simply made good and called for one card. Then he chipped without looking at his draw.

"Yer name is Mud this time," said Gallagher. "I don't want any cards an' I'll raise you the size o' the pot."

"Is that so?" asked Long Mike. "Well, maybe I've drawn an ace, I don't know. If I have, I'll raise you my pile." And he turned over the card he had drawn, exposing it to view. It was an ace, and without a word he shoved his chips all into the pot.

It looked like a winning, and Gallagher studied some time before playing. But, though it looked like a winning, it also looked like one of Long Mike's characteristic bluffs on finding himself confronted by a pat hand, and finally Gallagher said: "I've got to call you. Mine's a flush."

"An' mine's a trey full on aces," said Long Mike. "Faith if I'd known you was goin' to stand pat, I'd have taken two an' been beat." And a mighty cheer went up from the crowd, for the two players were nearly even again.

Gallagher scowled, but said nothing and played close. Winning and losing in turn for half an hour more, he fell slightly behind, so that he had less, instead of more, than half the chips when he caught four fours pat in a jack-pot that Long Mike opened. He raised, of course, and was raised in turn, till Long Mike called, and made ready to serve the draw.

"Gimme one," said Gallagher, carelessly, and was delighted when the other drew two. It looked like the chance of his life, and when Long Mike bet, he raised it his pile.

But Long Mike called him again and showed down four eights.

"Now," he said, "all ye have is mine, isn't it?"

"It is," said Gallagher, pluckily enough.

"Shtrip, then," said Long Mike, sternly, and the other without a word threw off his clothes till he had on nothing but a fine Irish blush. But he uttered no complaint, and the crowd that had jeered him unmercifully fell into silence and turned away its eyes as he walked toward the door.

Just as he reached it, however, Long Mike stopped him.

"Come back an' put on yer clothes," he said. "They do be fittin' yez betther nor they would me. Yer money I'll take, for ye'll worrk the harder for bein' broke, but yer house I don't want. Yer a man, afther all, Gallagher, an' I'll hire you over again. There's a boat whistlin' on the river now, an' ye'll hustle th' men down the levee right speedy."



VIII

A TRIAL OF SKILL

"THERE'S wan thing about Brownsville," said Stumpy, "that saves the place from bein' like wan o' them asylums f'r the feeble-moinded, where the min sews patchwork, an' the women shmokes pipes."

"Wot's eatin' you?" asked Sam, the bartender.

Sam had local pride which he held to be justified by his own prosperity, and he was apt to be gruff when any one spoke disparagingly of Brownsville. The two men had sat together on the levee, sociably silent for half an hour, when the spirit moved Stumpy to speech.

Having spoken, however, he sat as one relieved in his mind, and was in no haste for further conversation. It was therefore

some minutes before he replied, but at length he said:

“Sure, it puts me in moind o’ the great famine in Ireland me father used to tell of. Ye’d go for a week or a day wid sorry a bit t’ ate of annything at all, at all, an’ thin ye’d get maybe a pratie or a crusht, that’d kape ye goin’ a bit longer.

“There do be toimes in Brownsville that’d make ye think ye was dead an’ buried. Sure, the still o’ the nights is worse nor a thunder-shtorm for kapin’ a man awake, an’ the days is worse.

“An’ thin, whin ye do be goin’ melancholy mad wid the monny-tony o’ loife that isn’t livin’ at all, at all, but blue-mouldin’, some-thin’ or other’ll hit ye, loike a fri’ndly black-thorn at Donnybrook, an’ ye’ll sit up an’ take notice. Mostly it’s Long Mike, but times it’ll be something else.

“An’ whin it do come, ye’ll think for a time that Brownsville is wan o’ the hid cinters of all th’ excitement on the Mississippi River. Maybe it’s a bit o’ gun-play it’ll be, wid a tin-horn gambler, loike th’

toime th' one-eyed man cashed in, or belike it'll be somethin' or other wid Gallagher, but annyhow it shtirs things oop. This toime Oi do be thinkin' it'll be Hinnissy."

"An' why would it be Hennessy?" asked Sam.

"It wouldn't on'y f'r Gallagher," said Stumpy, "but thim two is like a hammer an' a shtick o' dynamite, or a mule's hind leg an' a sthraw. Av they do be kept apart, there's no great harrum, but av ye bring thim together, belike there's friction."

"They was playin' cards sociable enough last night," observed Sam.

"That's it," replied Stumpy. "When thim two gets sociable, ye wants to kape yer eye open. Whin it's a cussin' f'm Gallagher, him bein' foreman, or a kick f'm Hinnissy, that bein' his disposition, they're good friends. Sure they're both of thim Oirish. But whin they get fri'ndly, they do be two naturalized citizens, wid Oirish blood an' Mississippi River manners, an' God knows."

"Did you hear anything?"

"No, but I shmelt it, an' this mornin' the shmell is still in th' air. My dog Peter has the scint of it, shtrong. He kim out wid me for a walk, an' whin we passed Gallagher's, he sniffed around loike he do for a rat. An' he turned back an' lay down in the road near Hinnissy's place. Sure he knows more o' some things nor a Christian."

"Then you think there'll be trouble?" asked Sam, somewhat jeeringly.

"Sure, Oi don't think it," said Stumpy, "but Oi do be tellin' ye Oi shmell it."

What further discussion there might have been was cut off at this point by the appearance of two or three citizens in the distance. They were making their way leisurely toward Sam's place of business, and he, foreseeing a demand for his services, went indoors.

As if the appearance of the first comers on the street had been a signal, others presently appeared, and in a few minutes Brownsville had put on as much of an appearance of activity as was usual when there was no boat expected.

The first to arrive at the barroom was Long Mike himself, and he, looking around, conveyed with his eyes, in some almost imperceptible fashion, an invitation to Stumpy to step inside. Accordingly that gentleman arose, though without unseemly haste, and made one of a small group that presently lined up in front of Sam's bar.

Two of the group were Gallagher and Hennessy, and Stumpy was not the only one who noted with rising spirits the exaggerated politeness with which they spoke to each other. There had been nothing of importance doing in the community since navigation had closed at the beginning of winter, and as it was now almost warm weather again — warm enough, at all events, to tempt the people out-of-doors — the prospect of some excitement was exhilarating.

"It's a very good game you play at shtud-poker, Mr. Gallagher," said Hennessy, when the drink was swallowed and the pipes were all relighted.

"You do me proud, Mr. Hinnissy," replied Gallagher, with equal courtesy, "an'

ye play very well yersilf, barrin' th' matther o' poor luck now an' ag'in."

"Oi was thinkin' that same lasht night," said the other. "Av the cyards hadn't run till ye the way they did, belike ye'd not have won the money ye did."

"'Thot moight be, an' again maybe not," said Gallagher, still polite, but with a tone of satisfaction in his voice that Hennessy detected.

"Ye know," he said, "they run different, different toimes."

"They do," said Gallagher. "An' that's when the shkill comes in. Now yer own game is wan that wins, av ye have the cyards, but ye lose when ye haven't."

"An' don't ye find that same to be yer own experience?" asked Hennessy.

"Oi do not," said Gallagher. "Whin Oi haven't the cyards, Oi never bet. It's the wan thing ye have to l'arn about the game."

The matter of seven dollars that Hennessy had lost the night before was still rankling, and this intimation that it was his lack of ability as a player that caused him to lose

was hard to bear. He commanded himself with a visible effort and merely said:

"Maybe ye'd loike to exercise yer shkill some more the marnin', Oi don' know."

"Well," said Gallagher, "ye may have yer revenge an yer lukkin' for it." And the game was on.

There was some talk as they took their seats at the table about some of the others joining in, but Hennessy declared that he much preferred to play with Gallagher alone, and his wish was respected. They made it a ten-dollar freeze-out, and the others in the room gathered around to see the play.

For a considerable time it seemed as if Gallagher's boasting had some foundation in fact, for he played cautiously, and several times abandoned the hand when he had one or even two good cards showing, evidently believing that he was beaten by the other's buried card, but after he had got well ahead, Hennessy began to get good hands.

A pair of tens, back to back, he played cunningly, letting his opponent do the bet-

ting until the last card was dealt, when Gallagher bet a dollar on two eights in sight. Then he raised it three dollars, and, as this looked like a bluff, Gallagher called.

A similar play when he really held a straight with the middle card buried, against two pairs, netted him as much more, and the lucky chance of a third ace for the last card against three queens in sight enabled him to raise back to the extent of Gallagher's pile after he had passed the bet and Gallagher had shown his confidence in his queens.

He had won the freeze-out and was calmly tolerant when Gallagher said, with something of a sneer:

"Yez can all see now what I said. Whin Mr. Hennessy has the cyards he can play as well as the next."

"Oi can," he replied, loftily. "An' Oi can do betther nor that."

"An' how?" demanded Gallagher.

"Oi can lick the shtuffin' out of anny man that can't lick the shtuffin' out o' me."

"An' is it me ye mane?" asked Gallagher, almost choking.

"It is."

"It is foight ye mane?"

"It is."

"Av ye'll shtep outside," said Gallagher, "Oi'll shtand ye on yer head, an' dhrive yer body so far down in the mud they'll be usin' ye for an artooshun well."

"Ye may, thin," said Hennessy, and two minutes later they were out on the levee, with their coats off, locked in a grip that seemed unbreakable.

"What did Oi say till ye the marnin'," said Stumpy, as he and Sam stood watching the proceedings in keenest delight, together with nearly the entire male population of Brownsville. "There do be things happens here sometimes."

The excitement was so great, in fact, that for the moment no one noticed a bareheaded woman that came running up the street, almost breathless, but shouting as loudly as she could. When her voice reached the crowd, they perceived that it was the voice of Mrs. Hennessy, and there was an impera-

tive tone in it that arrested even the attention of the two who were fighting.

"Mikel!" she screamed, "Mikel darlint. The babby fell down in the cistern, an' Missus Gallagher climbed down wid a rope, an' we pulled the babby up, an' she's shtuck at the bottom. Sure ye'll coom an' pull her up. Hurry, for the love o' God."

They did hurry, all of them, and when Mrs. Gallagher was rescued, as she speedily was, Hennessy turned to his foe:

"Oi'll not foight you this day, Gallagher, but you'll dhrink wid me for the babby your good woman saved. An' so," he added, "will the whole o' Brownsville this day."

But while they drank, Stumpy remarked: "Sure it's almost a pity they couldn't ha' finished the shindy. It would ha' been worth seein'."



IX

A SOCIAL CALL

“HURROO!” exclaimed Long Mike, and fired a shot through the ceiling.

Had there been any antecedent circumstances to explain his outburst, Brownsville would have accepted it as a characteristic and perfectly natural act, but it chanced that nothing whatever had occurred for a full half-hour. The usual group had been sitting around the stove in the barroom, and the usual drone of entirely uninteresting conversation had buzzed along. Everybody had said something, but nobody knew or cared what anybody else had said.

It was therefore a matter of some surprise that even Long Mike should express himself with such vehemence. No one spoke for a moment or so after the shot, but all looked interested. Presently Sam, the bar-

tender, inquired with some anxiety if the big man felt well.

"Oi do not," replied Long Mike, as he put away his gun. "There do be nothin' at all, at all, that wears me out loike the dead shtillness o' winter weather, an' Oi'm thinkin' it's toime for a thaw. Ye've heard th' oice i' th' river cr-rack whin it's makin' ready to break up. Well, Oi feel loike cr-rackin' thot same way. It's toime somethin' was did."

"An' it's right y' are," said Stumpy, "but what? Sure, ivery j'int in me body is blue-mouldin' wid shtiffness from the want of excitement. Oi've a cr-ravin' for tumult that's worse nor a cr-ravin' for dhrink. Sure, a flood is better nor bein' froze up loike this."

"It's me, too," said Gallagher. "I have a touch o' the same complaint, but I don't see nothin' ahead till th' ice breaks up, an' the boats run again."

"Oi do," said Long Mike. "Jim Bixby was tellin' me yesterday that some o' thim shports in La Crosse was goin' dead, loike

us, f'r the lack o' things to do, an' Oi told him to tell thim to come over to Brownsville the next trip o' the stage. An' the stage is due now. Oi do be thinkin' there'll be some comin' the day."

The event proved that the big man had not miscalculated, for even as he spoke the jingle of sleigh-bells came up from the frozen surface of the river, and, as they all looked out, they saw Bixby driving, not the usual span, but a team of four horses over the thick ice, and bringing a big stage-load of men wrapped in furs and smoking furiously to keep the keen, cold air from their lungs.

It was one of the community visits with which men broke the monotony of the long winters in what was then called the great Northwest, and, because of the habits of the two communities, it seemed more than likely that there would be excitement enough before the La Crosse contingent should be ready to return.

Of the visiting delegation there were ten in all, but the most conspicuous among them,

as Long Mike was the principal figure in Brownsville, was one Tom Kraggs, a man of more than local fame, who had amassed a competence on the Mississippi boats by his success at the card-table, and had settled in La Crosse as the proprietor of what he called the "only first-class second-rate hotel in Wisconsin." It was a flourishing hostelry, with a large cardroom adjoining the barroom.

Kraggs was a quiet man, usually, with pleasant manners and a large chest measurement. At least a foot shorter than the big man of Brownsville, he was, in all his other dimensions, a worthy match, and one of the dreams of delight among the river men was the thought that sometime there might be a physical encounter between the two.

No set programme having been arranged for the festivities, the first ceremony was the usual tender of liquid hospitality. Sam became busy without special instructions, and for a long half-hour exerted himself manfully in response to the demands that came in rapid succession from this one and that who felt eager to uphold his part of the

burden of hospitality or pay his share of the tax of reciprocity.

A temporary lull in this exercise was filled with conversation, in which the dearth of news in both communities was duly discussed, and the day wore on toward a close with no special outbreak of excitement. It appeared, however, that three of the guests had brought certain pet game-cocks with them, so a series of cock-fights was arranged after a long discussion of terms, and by nightfall the floor of the barroom was sadly in need of a thorough cleansing. Then, after the lamps were lighted, and a hearty supper had been discussed, a game of draw-poker was proposed.

This, it was felt, was, after all, the main event of the day. Brownsville was not especially addicted to poker except on occasions when outside talent appeared, but there was enough local pride to justify a contest when a challenge was issued. And there was an overweening confidence in Brownsville in Long Mike's luck.

The two leaders arranged the terms and

virtually chose the players, so that the game was table stakes, each man to buy a hundred dollars' worth of chips for a starter, and six men to constitute the party. Long Mike took Stumpy and Hennessy, and Krag named Smithers, a beetle-browed Englishman in his party, and Jack Bains, a capable-looking lumberman from the upper river, to represent the visiting talent. Sam set out the chips and cards and served a preliminary drink, and the game was on.

For the first half-dozen hands there was little doing. The ante was a dime calling a quarter, no one caring to hurry the game, and all realizing that a hundred dollars was enough to give him a considerable run unless his luck was phenomenally bad. Presently, however, Hennessy saw what looked like an excellent opening and he opened a jack-pot.

To his intense joy he got three stayers, for he had three tens and a lot of confidence. It was Stumpy's deal, and he and Smithers had stayed out. In the draw Bains took three cards, Long Mike one, Hennessy one,

holding up an ace to his tens, and Krag called for two.

It was hard to figure chances on a draw like that, but Hennessy reckoned they would size him up for two pairs and he threw in ten dollars, thinking that he would call any raise he might get. He hadn't looked at his draw, but did not count on having bettered.

Krag saw the ten, having three sevens which he had not bettered, and a proper respect for Long Mike's one-card draw. Bains surrendered, and Long Mike raised it ten, having bettered his hand with a six spot that made a small straight.

Hennessy investigated and found he had caught another ace, which was, of course, enough to go back on; but Long Mike was not the player he was after, so he simply saw the raise, hoping for nothing more than a call from Krag. That gentleman, however, folded his cards. He had the name of knowing extremely well how to lay down when he was beaten. So nobody was badly hurt.

The next chance fell to Smithers on Long

Mike's deal, there being another jack-pot, and he opened for one dollar and a half, there being that amount in the pot. The struggle was longer this time, for everybody stayed and three men bettered. He threw in a white chip for a feeler, and Hennessy raised it five dollars on three queens. Krag stayed, having aces up, and Stumpy raised again with a flush. Bains made good, having filled a straight, and Long Mike lay down. He had three little ones, but a double raise scared him out.

Smithers looked at his hand doubtfully. He had opened it on kings and fours and had caught a seven in the draw, but deciding, whether it was good poker or not, to make a bluff, he came back with twenty dollars more. It was almost good, too, for it looked as if he had made a full house, and Hennessy dropped his three queens without a whimper, though he would have called if Stumpy had not raised him on the round before.

Krag lay down, and Stumpy did some thinking. It took nerve to call even with a flush, but finally he said: "Ye may have it,

I don't know, but Oi'll see it annyhow," and threw in his chips.

"That's good," said Bains, and Smithers had to show his two pairs.

"Tried to blow me, hey?" said Stumpy, tauntingly, as he raked in the chips. "Ye may do that in La Crosse, but it don't go here." And Smithers had nothing to say.

The next two deals were uneventful, and then Krag took the deck. His thick muscular fingers were well kept and white, after the usual rule as touching the hands of professional gamblers, and one who looked closely would have seen that they were singularly deft as well. As it happened there were three men at the table who were looking closely, and when he passed the cards over to Hennessy for the cut, that player riffled them three times before cutting them, whereat Stumpy grinned with glee, and Long Mike looked serene and satisfied.

Krag could say nothing, for Hennessy was within his rights, but he leaned a little over toward the left side as he dealt, leaving his right-hand hip pocket a little easier to

get at. It was only a slight indication of the possibilities, but there was not a man at the table who failed to notice it.

From that time on the tension increased. After Krag's deal Stumpy called for a new deck of another colour, and when that had been used twice, Long Mike ran over it carefully, and called for still another deck. "There's an ace o' hearts here," he said, "that a man can tell across the room." No charge of crooked play had been made, but the visitors saw that they were suspected, and they were well prepared for the row that was coming.

Long Mike it was that precipitated it. He was watching Krag's intently, and suddenly, as that player was discarding after serving the others with the draw in his own deal, Long Mike reached over and seized both his wrists with a lightning-like movement.

"Ye have six cards in yer hand, ye spalpeen, an' two in yer sleeve," and twisting Krag's hands remorselessly, he proved that he was right.

Instantly the room was in an uproar, and



“‘YE HAVE SIX CARDS IN YER HAND, YE SPALPEEN.’”



every one of the ten visitors had his gun out, excepting Krag, who was struggling violently but ineffectually to free his hands. The Brownsville men were as quick as the strangers, but, although three or four shots were heard, none reached a mark. And after a little time, Long Mike's voice commanded attention.

"Av we did the roight thing," he shouted, "we'd chop holes in th' oice, an' send yez ahl shwimmin' down th' river. But Oi'm thinkin' we can have more fun nor that. Yez'll ahl give yer guns to Sam, an' Oi'll take this omadhaun out-o'-doors an' woipe th' ground up wid him. An' Bixby'll hitch up an' carry what's left back to La Crosse the noight widout waitin' f'r sun-up."

No one dissented, for Krag and his followers were as confident as the Brownsville men, and moreover counted themselves lucky to get off as they did after the exposé. And then Smithers gave a new turn to the situation by saying, "I'll bet even money that Krag'll lick him."

In about three minutes all the available

cash in the party was staked on the contest and the two gladiators stripped for the fray.

Then was Brownsville glorified within three minutes more, for Long Mike stood with his hands down, waiting the other's onslaught. It came with a fury that would have demolished an ordinary man, but he took two blows that seemed enough to break his bones, and then wrapped his arms around Krag in such fashion as to hold him helpless. For a moment he stood thus, tightening his grip slowly, and then said, coolly:

"Ye'll tell me when ye have enough."

The other made no answer, but struggled like a wildcat, while Long Mike stood smiling and slowly tightening his awful grip. Not until the bones began to crack did the defeated man give up, but presently he gasped "Enough," and fell, half-dead, to the ground as the other released his hold.

"Oi'm thinkin', belike," said Stumpy, as they watched the stage start off, "thot we might have a party up here from Dubuque next week, I don't know. Thim social visits is foine divarsion."



X

STUMPY VIOLATES ETIQUETTE

THE fate of the one-eyed man had not been forgotten in Brownsville, but the lapse of time since his taking off had been sufficient to allay the excitement which it had occasioned.

This excitement, it may be said, was not the result of any fervent esteem which the one-eyed man might have enjoyed among his fellow citizens if he had been a person of more congenial temperament than he was. As a matter of fact, he had various traits of character which had distinctly failed to commend him to the hearty liking of the community, and while he lived there were not a few citizens who counted him among the least desirable of their number.

Brownsville, however, was not habituated

to homicide. Fights there were in Brownsville not infrequently, and a good shindy was commonly reckoned among the pleasurable variations to the monotony that characterized life in the little river town for something like three hundred and sixty days in the year.

Such fights, however, were usually carried to a more or less satisfactory conclusion without loss of life, and the sudden demise of the one-eyed man had aroused some horror, as well as a strong feeling of antipathy for the man who shot him. This feeling was also tempered by the lukewarmness of the sentiment of the community toward the one-eyed man, but the prevailing opinion was that Wharton had gone a little too far in shooting.

There was no disputing the fact, however, that it was a fair fight, and that the one-eyed man had brought it on himself, so there had been no attempt made to put Wharton on trial for the killing. He had gone away from Brownsville, and the general satisfaction at that had, of itself, tempered the

hostility he had provoked, which hostility was indeed no very powerful sentiment.

When the *Creole Belle*, however, tied up at the Brownsville landing, just at the edge of a summer evening, some months after the shooting, and Mr. Wharton stepped ashore, he failed to receive any enthusiastic welcome. Strangers who came ashore at Brownsville were not so numerous as to allow of his escaping recognition, and most of those whom he greeted on his way from the landing to the barroom responded with a cool "Howdy," but no one proffered a handshake, and none gave him spontaneous greeting.

It was not observed, however, that any of those in the barroom made any strenuous effort to avoid his invitation to partake of such refreshment as Sam had in readiness. It was therefore to be fairly inferred that time had mellowed the resentment which Mr. Wharton's violent action had originally provoked.

Perhaps no clearer statement of the actual condition of public sentiment could be made

than that which Stumpy put in words, speaking to Gallagher, as they returned to their work on the landing after they had followed the crowd into the barroom.

"I do be thinkin' this here Wharton 'ud be betther loiked," he said, "av he'd shtop some place where they knowed less about him. Av he shtays here, belike there'll be doin's."

"Maybe," said Gallagher, "but I reckon there's them here that'll kape him from too much killin', an' the most o' the houses is nailed down."

"Shure, it's not the likes o' that I'm thinkin'. 'Tain't likely he'll steal the town, nor yet the river," returned Stumpy, somewhat nettled at the other's indifference, "but he's not the koind o' man I loike to see."

"Shure, he's a gambler, an' he's too almighty free with his gun, I'm thinkin'. He'll carry away the money that belongs in the town, an' av there's anny row — an' belike there will be if Long Mike sits in wid him, it's not fightin' wid fists we'll see, but a shootin' scrape."

"Shure, I don't mind a bit o' a shindy, or a sociable game o' dhraw-poker, but thim kind is the wrong cattle to play wid."

"We'll see," said Gallagher, shortly, as he turned to his work.

He was an enthusiastic gambler himself, though a most unlucky one, and the notion of playing with a professional had no terrors for him. Moreover, the scent of a battle, even afar, was sweeter to him than new-mown hay. Stumpy, however, though by no means averse to excitement of any kind, was more conservative and had his forebodings.

Later in the evening, after the *Creole Belle* had discharged her freight and taken on that which was waiting for her, and had gone on down the Mississippi, leaving Mr. Wharton still in the barroom, it appeared altogether probable that some, at least, of these forebodings would be justified.

Sam had been kept tolerably busy in the meantime, Mr. Wharton having realized what was expected of him as a stranger, and being evidently disposed to fulfil his

obligations. Possibly in consequence of this the crowd around him, when Brownsville resumed its normal inactivity after the departure of the boat, was conversationally disposed.

Not less than four persons were talking at once, most of the time, and though Mr. Wharton did comparatively little talking and did not appear to have taken enough red liquor to affect his nerves in the least, it was noticeable that he was doing all he could to promote the general hilarity.

There could hardly be a doubt of his object. At all events, Stumpy entertained none, and though he did his duty conscientiously in seeing that none of Sam's liquor should go begging, as became one who was conversant with Brownsville's customs, he yet maintained a constant watchfulness, as one who feared the worst. When, presently, he heard Wharton propose a game of cards, he muttered:

"I knew it. Now for a battle, murder an' sudden death, I don't know. Av Long Mike sits in, an' the saints above cudn't

kape him out, there'll be doin's. Sure it's me for to shtand by."

Stand by, accordingly, he did. Wharton's proposal was seconded and adopted with alacrity, and Long Mike and Gallagher took their seats at the table eagerly. Hennessy also declared his willingness to buy chips, and the fifth hand was taken by a man named Cutler, who had been in town for some weeks, and was, therefore, known to them all excepting Wharton, but who had failed to arouse any feeling of liking or respect among the citizens.

Just why he was there he did not explain, nor did any demand an explanation; but it seemed so utterly unreasonable for a stranger to remain in Brownsville indefinitely that he was already an object of suspicion. He flashed his money with the others, however, and no one made objection to his playing.

The game was for table stakes, and, as each player bought a hundred to start, no one else in the room felt rich enough to take a hand. They all stood around looking on,

however, so Stumpy attracted no attention when he took his stand directly behind Wharton's chair, getting as close to it as he conveniently could without touching it. It so happened, moreover, that Cutler sat nearly opposite to him, being the third man to Wharton's left.

For a considerable time the play was uneventful, and the luck appeared to run more evenly than was to be expected. Even Gallagher did not lose as rapidly as usual, and Long Mike's proverbial good luck failed to appear.

In less than half an hour, however, the big hands began to come, and the play became strenuous enough to put an end to general conversation. Nothing was heard but the few stock phrases which ordinarily announce the play at poker, and not only the players, but the onlookers, became more and more excited.

A full hand that Gallagher caught pat on Long Mike's deal gave him the opportunity to open a jack-pot under the guns, which he did for five dollars, there being

that amount in the pot. Cutler came in, and so did Hennessy, whereupon Wharton raised it ten dollars.

Long Mike skinned his cards down, and finding three sevens, concluded they were worth playing, so he saw the raise, and Gallagher promptly came back with ten more. Cutler hesitated a little, but saw the double raise, and Hennessy dropped out.

Wharton studied a bit, but finally made it ten more to play, and Long Mike shoved his money forward with a dogged air, as if he knew, as he did, that he was overplaying his hand, but was determined not to be driven out.

Gallagher still had some fifty dollars in front of him, and he pushed that forward eagerly, whereupon Cutler dropped, and Wharton simply made good. Then Long Mike made a few remarks.

They were profane rather than pertinent, being of the nature of a reflection on his own discretion in playing further, but his characteristic dislike to being driven out made him put up his money, and he asked

the others what they wanted in the draw. Neither of them took cards, so, with considerable more bad language, Long Mike took two for himself.

"I'm all in," said Gallagher, and Wharton threw in a white chip carelessly, with the evident thought that Long Mike had no show and would not see any considerable bet.

To his surprise and disgust, however, Long Mike not only saw his side bet, but shoved his whole pile forward. It was clear that he had made fours, or a full, or was bluffing outrageously, but as Wharton himself had four fives, he felt compelled to call.

Gallagher had struck his usual luck, and Long Mike had found his, for his last card was the fourth seven. It put Gallagher out of the game, for he had only twenty dollars more in his pocket, and they refused to let him buy in again for so little. Wharton, however, took another hundred, having only a few chips left.

The next two deals were uneventful, but

when Wharton took the cards, there being a jack-pot on, Long Mike opened it. The other two stayed, and again Wharton raised.

No one came back at him, but they all stayed, and on the draw they took two cards apiece. It looked like three of a kind all round.

Long Mike bet a chip. Cutler and Hennessy trailed and Wharton raised. Long Mike stayed and Cutler raised back.

Hennessy, who had been playing cautiously from the beginning, threw down his cards, and Wharton raised again. Still Long Mike stayed, and Cutler raised once more.

Once more Wharton went back at him, and though no single raise had been more than five dollars, Long Mike seemed suddenly suspicious. He looked from one to the other keenly, and then studied his hand carefully. Suddenly he pushed fifty dollars forward, and it was up to Cutler.

That worthy hesitated and looked at Wharton. Whether it was a look of inquiry is doubtful, but Stumpy chose to consider

it so, and he violated all poker etiquette unhesitatingly.

"Why don't ye play yer own hand, ye omadhaun," he demanded, fiercely, "an' not be lookin' at yer pal for instructions?"

The uproar came on the instant. The players all sprang to their feet, upsetting the table, and Wharton and Cutler both reached for their guns. Hennessy, however, grabbed Cutler, and Stumpy seized Wharton's wrist in a grip of iron.

"Ye'll not shoot," he said. "Ye've kilt wan man in Brownsville already, an' that's enough. We foight different here. Av ye feel yerself aggrieved, Oi'll front ye, man to man, but there'll be no gun in yer hand. Sure I saw yez passin' signals to yer pal, so I'm thinkin' ye'll play no more poker here, ayther."

The hubbub was indescribable, but when it became possible to distinguish voices it appeared that popular sentiment was on Stumpy's side. Wharton and Cutler refused to fight with nature's weapons, and, since they were not allowed possession of

their pistols again, they retired in as good order as possible to the landing-place, where another boat was just coming in.

After they had gone up the river together, Stumpy said confidentially to his dog Peter:

“Sure, I saw nothin’ out o’ way, Peter, but ye’ll not mention that same. Thim gamblers is pizen, an’ the quickest way o’ gettin’ rid o’ thim was the best.”

And Peter barked loudly and wagged the remains of his tail.



XI

THE NEW POKER RULE MADE IN ARKANSAS

IT seemed a pity, after peace had prevailed so long in Brownsville, to have Long Mike and Gallagher at odds again. The big man had made no attempt for fully a year and a half to kill his foreman, and men had thought the feud was past, yet once again the smaller man was now seeking safety while Long Mike raged like a lion in his quest for his old-time foe.

"Sure I do be thinkin' we'll niver have peace in th' place widout a firsht-class killin'. 'Tis th' only thing as'll shtill th' atmosphere," said Stumpy.

It had broken out over a game of poker, but no man knew whether the smouldering embers of hatred had blazed up at a chance word, or whether some fresh spark had been kindled by the friction of the game.

Jim Titherton had been greatly astonished. Titherton was a gentleman of more or less elegant leisure, who spent much of his time travelling up and down the Mississippi River, stopping frequently at the smaller towns where the boats landed, but very seldom at any of the cities. Ashore he was never known to busy himself in any recognized commercial pursuit, but he was always ready and willing to play a game of cards with anybody who was properly qualified to play.

He had been in Brownsville for two days, and had already begun to look for the arrival of the next boat, finding that Brownsville was not overanxious to play cards with strangers, when somewhat to his surprise Long Mike invited him to play.

Of itself, this was a fact requiring explanation, but the further fact that Long Mike had started in made it unnecessary to seek any explanation for anything he might do. There was only one thing certain about Long Mike's actions once he started in, and

that was that he would do whatever would naturally be least expected.

When he challenged Mr. Titherton to a game of draw-poker, however, something like consternation was immediately manifest among the other occupants of the barroom. One evidence of the simplicity of life in Brownsville was that Sam had never found it necessary to adopt a name for his saloon. It did not have to be distinguished from the other barrooms, because there were no others.

In consequence, the main part of the male population of Brownsville sat in Sam's place evenings, and when the leading citizen of the place, being not too completely in command of all his faculties, proposed to play poker with a stranger who was known to have suspicious ability as a player, to say the least, it was realized that a common peril impended; for Long Mike was not only the chief capitalist and the sole employer of labour in the place, but he was also known to be entirely reckless when he was well started, and capable of playing away his entire earthly possessions. Mr. Titherton,

therefore, stood to win practically all the money in Brownsville unless something was done promptly.

It was true that Long Mike was lucky. It was one of the traditions of Brownsville, and the story had travelled both up and down the river, that nobody could win money from Long Mike in a square game, provided that gentleman kept sober enough to count his chips. But Brownsville realized that luck alone was not likely to avail much to the man who played single-handed with Mr. Titherton.

The obvious expedient, therefore, was to increase the number of players in the game. It seemed certain that if Titherton and Long Mike played a two-handed game, disaster would befall, but if several others should sit in, there would at least be the chance of frustrating any schemes of iniquitous play that might be instituted, and there would be the further possibility of breaking the game up by force of arms in case the disaster should become imminent.

It was usually Stumpy who spoke first, and

this occasion proved to be no exception. Knowing the uncertain temper of his boss, he realized the necessity for diplomacy, and therefore spoke as one who might address the entire atmosphere:

"Av it wasn't for me bein' th' cr-rack player in Brownsville, maybe it's me 'ud be as't for to take a hand, I don't know. Sure, it 'd be loike takin' a bottle o' milk from a babby. It 'd be a sin f'r me to play."

Long Mike looked at him uncertainly for a time. Then he laughed contemptuously.

"Since when did ye l'arn the game, Stumpy?" he said. "Sure, it was last week I bluffed ye out on a pair o' deuces."

"There's ne'er a man this side o' Memphis," replied Stumpy, steadily, "can bate me at th' game, barrin' it's Gallagher, yander, an' maybe Ferguson, av he have the luck."

"It's Gallagher, is it?" said Long Mike, his face darkening at the mention of the name. "An' Ferguson. An' you. Sure it's a foine pair the three av yez is. Belike anny wan o' yez 'd play betther blindfold. But

there, then, the more o' yez cooms in, the more money there'll be in th' game. We'll play five-handed."

It took no diagram of the situation to explain matters to Gallagher and Ferguson, and it is proper to say that they saw their duty and did it like men, though it is certain that neither of them had any more relish for the undertaking than had Stumpy. Their loyalty to Long Mike was greatly stimulated by the realization of the peril to the common interest involved in his playing single-handed against Mr. Titherton, and they took their places at the card-table unhesitatingly.

Moreover, they took their places beside one another, and so contrived, without seeming to contrive, that Long Mike should sit on Titherton's left, leaving the latter gentleman, to say the least, with no advantage of position. It would be his say in each round before Long Mike's, so that he could not model his play on the latter's.

For, it should be explained, Brownsville's dislike to playing with strangers came from no lack of science, or skill, or courage. It

arose merely from the fact that manual dexterity in the deal was the one thing which Brownsville could not boast. In all other respects, the Brownsville game of poker was well up to the Mississippi River standard.

They made the game table stakes, and each man flashed fifty dollars for a starter. They were used to a moderate game, but they all knew that it was liable to grow to much greater dimensions if Long Mike should become excited.

For the first few rounds, however, there was no great excitement. The hands ran tolerably well, two flushes and a full being shown inside of twenty minutes, with a straight and several threes, but no strong hands were out together, and there was no contest of any importance.

Then came what looked at first like a struggle. It was Stumpy's deal, and Ferguson had put up the ante, fifty call a dollar.

Titherton came in, and so did Long Mike. Gallagher raised it two dollars. Stumpy and Ferguson dropped, and Tither-

ton made it three more. That was a sufficient indication to Long Mike, and he passed it up to Gallagher, who promptly raised it five.

Titherton threw in his five and called for two cards. Gallagher called for one, and Titherton threw in a white chip. Gallagher looked at his draw carefully, and pushed his entire pile into the pot.

Thereupon Titherton studied for a full minute. He looked keenly at his antagonist's face, and then he looked at his own hand again. And lastly he counted his chips, as if intending to call, keeping his head bent down, but watching Gallagher meantime out of the corner of his eye. Then suddenly he threw down his cards.

Gallagher said nothing as he drew in the pot, but there was a slight twitching at one corner of his mouth which led those who knew him best to suspect that he had not filled his flush. As this was no longer a matter of any importance nothing was said about it.

Ferguson dealt next, and as no one caught

a hand, the cards passed to Titherton, and he dealt for a jack-pot.

It had not escaped Mr. Titherton's notice, previous to this deal, that his manner of handling the cards had been the subject of close scrutiny, but he had not deemed it expedient to say anything about it. Now, however, as he began to serve the cards after the cut, he was somewhat astonished to see three of the players lean suddenly forward, so that their faces were within a foot of the table, and to notice that three pairs of eyes seemed to be fixed intently on his fingers.

"What the ——?" he exclaimed in surprise, and, stopping the deal, he glared for a moment at each of the three in turn.

They looked at him blandly in return, but volunteered no explanation, and he went on dealing, red with anger, but saying nothing more.

Long Mike had apparently taken no notice of all this, being occupied with some red liquor that Sam had brought to him in response to his rather boisterous demand, but when he had received his cards he

looked at them carelessly and promptly opened the pot for the size of it.

When the others had seen their cards, they all came in, up to the dealer, and he raised it ten dollars. Long Mike hesitated, as if about to raise it back, but evidently decided that he was not in a good place for that play, so he merely made good.

Gallagher and Stumpy both came in on the raise, but Ferguson dropped. Long Mike then called for two cards, and as Titherton picked up the deck to serve him the three leaned forward again and watched the dealer's fingers as they had done before.

Again Titherton paused, as if he had in mind to resent the insult, and again he thought better of it, and went on with the deal. Gallagher took one card and Stumpy took two, but they did not move to pick them up, keeping their eyes fixed on Titherton.

"The dealer takes one," said Titherton, and he dropped one card alongside his hand, which lay in front of him.

Then the three straightened up and looked at one another, as if greatly astonished,

"Is thot the reg'lar game?" asked Gallagher.

"It is," said Stumpy. "Thot is, it's the new rule they've made in Arkansas. Maybe it's rig'lar on th' river now, I don't know. In Arkansas the dealer has th' privilege o' ta-akin' a card from the bottom or the top, av ye don't see ut."

"But how if you see ut?" asked Gallagher.

"Thot depinds," said Stumpy. "On th' boats they shoot, but on shore the dealer gen'ly goes over the levee, an' all hangs on how he can shwim."

"I'll bet ten dollars," said Long Mike, throwing the money in the pot.

He had been looking rather confusedly at his cards while the others talked, not paying attention to what they said. But Tither-ton interposed.

"Hold on a minute," he exclaimed, laying his hand down in front of him and putting some chips on the five cards.

He moved and spoke very deliberately.

"Will you gentlemen be good enough to



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explain what you are talking about?" he demanded.

"We will," said Stumpy. "We was discussin' a new rule in dhraw-poker."

"Ut were called to moind," said Gallagher, "by a slight pecooliarity av yer digital manœuvres."

They said that Gallagher had once been a schoolmaster.

"You're a liar," said Titherton, that being the next regular move in the game, and, as custom required, he pulled his gun at the same instant and covered Gallagher.

Three other revolvers appeared at the same instant, and if Long Mike had not been a person of almost preternatural promptness, there would have been gun-play if not bloodshed in the room. He moved like a cat, however, and Titherton's gun went spinning across the room before he could pull the trigger. Long Mike had seized his wrist and shaken it, and the bones came near snapping.

"Ye'll cease yer palaver, an' play the hand," said the big man, as angry as the

others. "Av there's foightin' to do, ye'll do it afther. An' if ye're afther takin' a card from the bottom o' the deck, ye'll kape it an' Oi'll play ye annyhow. But that omadhaun there, he's no liar. Oi'll say that for him. But he'll settle wi' me later for breakin' up this play."

But this amazing proposition met with no favour from any one. Titherton struggled like a wild beast in his rage, but was unable to free himself, though he began to bite at Long Mike's fingers, and the others sprang to their feet.

"Don't shoot," said Stumpy, putting away his gun. "Let's run the spalpeen into the river." And the other two started to help him.

But Long Mike was aroused by the pain of a sharp bite, and his temper gave way. His strength was as the strength of seven men, and he, too, arose, knocking the table over as he lunged forward. Seizing Titherton with both hands he lifted him high in the air and threw him violently against the wall, whence he fell unconscious to the floor.

Then the big man made a rush for Gallagher.

"Oi'll kill yez this time!" he exclaimed, and Gallagher knew that he would.

It was, therefore, small wonder that he dodged under Long Mike's arm and made a flying leap through the window, carrying sash and all with him.

There was a frantic pursuit, but Gallagher had gained a few seconds of a start and was nowhere to be found. After a good part of the night had been spent in fruitless search, they bethought them of Titherton, and went back to look for him, but he had recovered consciousness and had made his escape also.

"Sure it's a pity we didn't throw him in the river whin he were stunned, an' he'd niver ha' knowed th' difference," said Stumpy, discontentedly.

But Long Mike raged as was his fashion, and called for red liquor many times, breathing out threats of what he would do on the morrow, till the others saw that it was neces-

sary to encourage him in his effort to get a sufficiency of liquor.

And when they had finally accomplished this, and had put him safely in his own bed, Stumpy said again:

"Sure there'll be no such thing as livin' quiet an' peaceable in Brownsville till we have a firsht-class killin'. But Oi do be thinkin' it'll not be Gallagher. He do get away too often."



XII

A STRANGER AND FOND OF POKER

THE Mississippi River packet *City of Natchez* had been tied up at the levee in Arkansas City for possibly half an hour. The passengers who wanted to go ashore had gone, all but one, and the roustabouts were struggling with the freight under the inspiring influence of the mate's energetic comments.

Possibly because of their terrified condition, resulting from the mate's flow of language, but more probably because of their total indifference to consequences, they paid no attention whatever to a short, red-headed gentleman who might perhaps have been born in Ireland, and who came strolling from the direction of the boat's barroom toward the single gangplank, now in use by the freight department.

Even as they paid no attention to him, he paid none to them, but approached the gangplank somewhat unsteadily, with the evident intention of going ashore. The mate's attention for the moment was fixed on some point at the other side of the deck, or it is a moral certainty that he would have interposed language of sufficient strength to arrest the belated passenger's progress.

As it happened, however, there was none to warn him of his danger, and he stepped in debonair fashion on the sloping gangplank, serenely unconscious of the fact that four huge darkies were coming behind him, bearing a case of goods on their shoulders that must have weighed something like a thousand pounds.

It is an open question whether they saw that he was in their way, but it is absolutely certain that they recognized no obligation on their part to shout a warning. On they came, jog-trotting along till they were only a single pace behind him, when he either tripped or slipped, and, staggering, seemed about to fall. Had he fallen and so tripped

the rousters, the matter would have been serious indeed.

Just as he lost his balance, a sinewy hand was stretched forth from somewhere in the darkness, for it was late at night, and catching the tottering gentleman by the lapel of his coat, gave him such a mighty and overmastering yank that he darted forward on the double-quick for thirty or forty feet, and fell all in a heap on the levee. As he lay there, he was hopelessly undignified in appearance, but he was out of the path of the roustabouts.

Quite as if nothing whatever had happened, he looked up at his unknown preserver, who could now be seen indistinctly, and said in a conversational tone:

“Sure, Oi do be think (hic) thinkin’ the citizens o’ this (hic) this town is domned hard oop fer popu (hic) population. Does yez git ivery (hic) iverybody ashore, loike (hic) iverybody (hic) does yez —”

Here his voice trailed off to a murmur, and it seemed probable to the tall, powerful man who stood over him that he was likely

to go to sleep where he lay if something were not done promptly. Promptness, however, was a prominent characteristic of Mr. Joseph Bassett, the sheriff of the county, and the stranger speedily arose, a wetter and a soberer man — likewise an angrier.

With these various considerations Joe Bassett was no whit concerned excepting that the fact of the stranger having been aroused made his own duty somewhat easier of performance. As the short man began sputtering in a peculiarly red-headed fashion, Joe calmly interrupted him.

“ It’s ag’in the law, stranger, f’r any galoot f’m off’n a boat fer to go an’ git hisself killed on the levee in Arkansas City by a packin’-case or any other murderous weepin in the hands o’ roustabouts or anybody else. ’Pears to me you must be a stranger in these parts. Ever been into a town of any size afore? ”

The short man continued to sputter as if nothing had been said, so Joe looked at him with mild curiosity for a moment, and then said:

"Hyer now. That'll be about enough. I'd ought for to arrest you for disturbin' the peace o' them roustabouts, but if you've got money enough to settle a hotel bill, I reckon I might better take you there. Have ye?"

"Oi have," said the little man.

"What's your name?" asked the sheriff, presuming on his official position to disregard a point of strict etiquette in the community.

"Mostly they do be callin' me Stumpy, whin Oi'm at home in Brownsville," said the little man, whose wrath seemed to have cooled as the water dripped off his face. "Av that's a good enough name for Brownsville, sure it'll do here."

"Come along then, Stumpy," said the sheriff, good-naturedly, as he linked his arm in the little man's and steadied his steps toward the hotel across the street.

The landlord had no scruples against dispensing red liquor to any man who was in the company of the sheriff, and it came about that the three had sundry drinks which

Stumpy paid for with great cheerfulness before going to bed.

Soon after he had done this, Mr. Bassett dropped in at old man Greenhut's saloon, and after some irrelevant remarks reported the presence of a stranger in town.

"What's he like?" demanded Greenhut.

"Well, he's red-headed an' I reckon he's Irish, but 'pears like he had some money. He didn't flash no wad, but he ain't no ways mean with his loose change."

"You can't al'ays tell," said old man Greenhut. "The Good Book says, 'Him that hath, keeps, an' f'm him that hath not, the loose change ofttimes leaks.' Still, it's worth lookin' into. Some o' you boys had better be up to the hotel when he gets round. Maybe he might have a likin' f'r draw-poker."

Accordingly, it happened that when Stumpy came down to the hotel barroom next morning in search of an appetite, he discovered a couple of strangers there who were by no means unsociably disposed. Further, he discovered that they were Jake

Winterbottom and Sam Pearsall by name, citizens of Arkansas City, who esteemed it a privilege to make strangers acquainted with the resources of the place in the way of sports and pastimes.

Several of these were mentioned, but it appeared that horse-racing was out of season, and there had been no cock-fights arranged for the day. In fact, the only amusement available, so far as these two could say, was a quiet game of draw which was likely to be started at any hour in Greenhut's back room.

"Gintlemen, Oi'm wid yez," said Stumpy. "We do be playin' dhraw-poker in Brownsville whiles, but it's more f'r th' spoort we play nor the money."

Mr. Winterbottom and Mr. Pearsall heartily agreed that the game ought always to be played for sport rather than for money. In fact, they said, the game was always played in Greenhut's place for sport. Sometimes, when the players got warmed up, the stakes grew rather large, but usually it was

a small game carried on for amusement and the promotion of Greenhut's bar trade.

"Has he a bar?" demanded Stumpy.

They assured him that he had an excellent bar, and Stumpy demanded that they should all three go forthwith to Greenhut's. As neither of the others had any objection, they were soon sampling Greenhut's liquor.

In paying for the drinks Stumpy showed a roll of respectable size containing at least a few fives and tens, so no one showed any reluctance in joining the game which Stumpy himself proposed, and five players presently bought chips in the back room, Bassett and Plunkitt joining the two who had invited the stranger in.

"One o' th' most interestin' stories in the Good Book," remarked old man Greenhut to the little group that remained with him in the front of the saloon, "is that there yarn 'bout the ravens that fetched food to Joseph when his brethren pitched him in a pit. Nobody knowed where them ravens come from, but they fetched Joseph so much



**"IN PAYING FOR THE DRINKS STUMPY SHOWED A ROLL
OF RESPECTABLE SIZE."**

[REDACTED]

corn inside o' seven year 't him an' his family fed on it f'r seven year more.

"'Pears like there's ravens comin' f'm up the river, an' f'm down the river, to feed Arkansas City. This here bird is a trifle off colour for a raven, but his wad looks good."

In the back room things were not quite satisfactory. A table stakes game was started and each man bought five dollars' worth of chips. The local talent considered this small, but Stumpy said they always began the game that way in Brownsville, and they deferred to his preference, remembering that it was always possible to buy more chips and so increase the size of the possible bet.

Presently, however, it appeared that there were other peculiarities in the Brownsville game, or at least in the game Stumpy played. He refused to come in, hand after hand, with no apparent impatience at the chipping out process, even when he was forced to buy his second five. Then, suddenly, he came in without looking at his hand, and when

he was raised, pushed his whole pile into the pot.

Winterbottom had three sevens, and he saw the bet unhesitatingly. Pearsall had nothing, but he put in his money on the theory that his chance was as good as any man's who had not looked at his hand. The sheriff, with one pair, considered it a fair gamble, and Plunkitt came in to be sociable.

On the draw Stumpy stood pat, still without looking at his cards, which lay face down in front of him. Winterbottom drew two without bettering, and neither of the others improved his hand.

As Winterbottom had opened, he bet a blue chip on the side, which the sheriff called, having kings, and the other two laid down. Stumpy, being all in, was not affected by the side betting, and let his cards remain on the table.

Winterbottom, being called, showed his three sevens.

"That's good," said the sheriff, showing his kings, and they all looked at Stumpy.

"Sure, Oi don't know," he said, drolly,

"but Oi do be thinkin' maybe Oi'll bate thim others," and he turned his cards over one at a time.

The first four were diamonds, and he looked at Winterbottom.

"Have yez anny propositions?" he asked, with a grin.

"I reckon not," said Winterbottom.

"Oi thought maybe ye'd be afther wantin' to shplit th' pot. Sure, thim diamonds is mighty pretty."

"Go on," said Jake, impatiently.

"Oh! Very well," said Stumpy, and he turned another diamond.

It gave him nearly sixteen dollars as against the ten he had put in, and after counting it carefully he said he guessed he'd quit.

At this there was a chorus of protest. "Do you mean to say you've got four North American citizens to waste half an hour for you to win six dollars?" demanded Pear-sall.

"It's what I call a dirty trick," said Plunkitt.

“Aisy, now, aisy,” said Stumpy. “Oi told yez Oi play this game fer spoort, an’ Oi’ve had all the spoort Oi’m loikely to have. Thim things don’t happen twice. Yez needn’t look dangerous. Oi’ll not foight yez, on’y wan at a toime. Oi’m Oirish, but Oi’m not Oirish enough for that. Yez’ll all have another dhrink with me.”

And that was all the Arkansas City players accomplished with Stumpy.

After he had gone on his hilarious way, old man Greenhut looked after him indig-nantly, and said:

“I reckon them ravens that fed Joseph must ha’ been some other breed. They sure wa’n’t red-headed blackbirds.”



XIII

ON HAND JUST ONCE

"IT certainly is really amazin'," said old man Greenhut, "how folks keeps on a-missin' of it, all their lives, by not bein' on the spot. 'N I've noticed always that the folks that ain't thar all the time ain't never thar. Once a feller gits the habit o' bein' thar, he's always thar, but once he gits out o' the habit, or if he never gits it, he ain't never round when the grand opportunity comes, and just naturally he misses it. Don't seem to make no difference how likely a man is, or how hard he may try to git a holt o' the persimmons o' luck that the good Lord keeps a-growin' all the time for everybody that's got the gumption to knock 'em off the bushes, he don't never get none of 'em 'thout he's thar, an' as I said, such folks ain't never thar.

"Now thar's Tenspot Ike. Thar ain't no capabler feller 'n him in town 'n' everybody likes him. If a man wants to stand treat, thar ain't nobody that'd be more likely to get 'nvited than him, an' yet Ike, he'll set around here day in an' day out, waitin' for some good angel to step down an' trouble the pool o' Siloam, the same bein' a bottle o' good old rye for the purpose of illustration, an' thar won't be nobody. But just as sartin as some open-hearted friend o' humanity comes along with a ragin' thirst an' the price for two, Ike ain't around. I call it wicked an' bad for trade for a man to fly in the face o' Providence like that."

The old man looked again at the battered half-dollar he had just taken in, and bit on it to make sure it was good. Then looking once more into his cash-drawer to make sure that he had given out the lead quarter in change that had come back to him so often, he came out from behind the bar and took his favourite seat by the window.

"D'ye ever hear how Ike come to be called Tenspot?" he asked in a general sort

of way, after he had carefully inspected the stump of a cigar that was between his teeth as usual, and had lighted it up again. If anybody had ever heard the story, he forbore to speak, and the old man kept right on talking.

“There wasn’t never nothin’ the matter with Ike,” he said, “except that pesky habit o’ his o’ bein’ always somewheres else. You could always count on him with a copper. ’F you wanted him anywheres special, he wasn’t there. I remember one time we’d ketched a hoss thief right here in town, ’n’ had everythin’ ready to send him off to glory sudden like, exceptin’ for a Testament to swear the witnesses on, an’ Ike had the on’y copy o’ the Good Book there was in town.

“Some o’ the boys was in favour o’ swingin’ him right up without formalities, arguin’ that as long as we’d ketched him in the act, an’ there wa’n’t no doubt o’ what he was tryin’ to do, there wa’n’t no use o’ wastin’ time on a trial, but I says, ‘No; to do that’d degrade Arkansas City to the level o’ barbarism,’ I says, ‘or a second-class

minin' settlement. Sich things is all right,' I says, 'whar ther 'ain't no civilization, nor none o' the refinin' influences o' religion, but Arkansas City ain't no such place. Let's hang him decent-like an' 'cordin' to law,' I says, 's'long's we've got it to do. An' ther ain't no such thing as legal testimony,' I says, 'thout it's sworn to on the Good Book.'

"Well, the boys was reasonable, an' some of 'em went looking for Ike, he havin', as I said, th' on'y copy o' th' Testament ther was in town. 'Course he wasn't round in none o' the saloons where he usually kept hisself, an' while they was a-lookin' fer him, that pesky hoss thief managed some ways or another to git away. When we did find Ike, he was tryin' to teach two Chinamen, that had just come to town an' was in a fair way to starve to death runnin' a laundry, how to play poker. 'Stands to reason,' Ike says, when I as't him how he come to do it, 'that them unfortunate heathen wouldn't never make day's wages,' he says, 'runnin' no laundry here, so I was just puttin' 'em in a way to make an honest livin' by showin'

'em the principles o' draw-poker.' He give 'em a fair start, too, as it happened, for he dropped seventeen dollars in good American money in that little missionary enterprise o' his'n. The boys said it was a judgment o' heaven on him fer not bein' where he'd oughter ha' been, as he usually ain't, besides bein' a grave reflection on Arkansas City in lettin' that hoss thief git off. I fined the feller the drinks that had business to've shot him as he ran, fer not havin' his gun ready, an' just naturally he bought 'em in my place, so I wasn't none the loser, but it was a great public calamity. I'd most rather he hadn't got away.

"I ain't a-sayin' but what Ike's natural talent fer bein' somewheres else was a benefit to him on one occasion. That was when Bill Briscom was found in the road with the top of his head blowed off. We all knowed that him an' Ike had had a serious difficulty the day before, an' there was some talk o' holdin' Ike fer trial on suspicion, but Ike he heard about it, just naturally, an' he spoke up like a man: 'I ain't a-sayin' but

that I'd oughter ha' killed the feller,' he says, 'fer I caught him cheatin' at cards, an' I licked him good an' proper, an' the galoot swore he'd shoot me on sight, but it stands to reason,' he says, 'that in order to ha' killed him, I'd 'a' had to be there at the time. Now I leave it to all of you to say whether I was ever whar I'd oughter be at the time when I was needed. You all know my weakness, gentlemen,' he says, 'an' I ask you to join me in drinkin' to the memory o' the late departed. He warn't no good, but as long as he's gone we can afford to forgive him fer all he done.'

"Well, that settled that matter, though some o' Brisco's friends, for he had some friends who said he wasn't half-bad, an' who kind o' thought Ike had ought for to own up that he shot him in a fair fight—them friends was disposed to push the matter to a trial. But I says to 'em, 'You can't never convict him,' I says. 'Ike's constitutional infirmity,' I says, 'is too well known to the community. There ain't no jury in this country,' I says, 'that'd find him guilty.'

"But that ain't tellin' you how he come to be called Tenspot Ike," said the old man, suddenly remembering what he had started to say. "That were a most remarkable story, an' p'int's several morals. In the first place, it were the on'y time in his life that Ike was ever knowed to be on hand when he was wanted, and there's no manner o' doubt it were the last. Then it were the occasion of a most miraculous delivery of the credit an' cash capital of Arkansas City from eternal smash by means of a casual ten-spot of clubs that Ike, by some utterly unaccountable dispensation of Providence, happened to have in his pocket.

"The way of it was this. It was in the time o' the spring floods, an' the river had been up for nigh two months, an' Arkansas City was all afloat up to the second story, 'xcept on the levee. There were a boat now an' again, of course, but they'd just tie up at the levee for a few minutes, an' the folks that had been thinkin' o' comin' ashore would just look around for a spell, kind o' discouraged like, and then they'd set down

on the boat again an' go on down the river, or up, as the case might be, an' you couldn't blame 'em. The railroad was washed away for ten miles back, an' there wasn't no other way to git out o' town. Just naturally folks took the way they was sure of, there bein' nothin' to stay here for. There bein' no strangers in town, the boys played poker among themselves pretty constant, for there wasn't nothin' else to do while the river was up, an' after the first five weeks the entire cash capital of the place was in the possession of two men. It was a case o' what the Good Book tells about when it says that him as has shall win, and him that has nothin' shall lose that which he seemeth to have. Jim Harris and Pete Barlow won everything in sight, an' there wasn't another man in town among the sporting set that had a dollar to his name. 'Course there was some of us taxpayers that didn't play frequent, that had money in the bank, but the sports was all flat broke 'xcept them two. We was all looking for them to come together an' for one of 'em to eat the other up, but for some reason

they didn't, each bein' more or less afraid of the other as near as I c'd figger it. Pete an' Ike was good friends, but Jim Harris hated Ike like p'ison for reasons of his own, an' Ike like a good Christian was always lookin' for a chance to pile red-hot coals on him.

"Well, just then some crossroads gambler from Mississippi come along the river lookin' for blood. He'd raked one or two other towns clean, an' just naturally arrove here with a wad bigger'n his head. He drifted around the first day tryin' to get acquainted, an' some o' the boys spotted him, an' lost no time in tellin' our two capitalists about him an' his wad. Thar was some backin' an' fillin', but the second day the three come together right here in this room an' after some talk got to playin' cards. The news got around an' the room was tol'-able nigh full o' the boys. All of 'em was pinin' for the destruction o' that stranger, just for the sake of encouragin' home talent, but there wasn't many of 'em that cared whether Harris or Barlow'd git away with him, so

long as one of 'em should do the trick. Ike was here, o' course. If he'd had money enough to set into the game I s'pose he'd ha' been in Little Rock, but bein' as there wasn't no earthly probability o' his bein' wanted here, he was just naturally here. But the dispensation o' Providence is very often mysterious an' he turned out to be the chosen instrument o' heaven for the salvation of Arkansas City.

"They played an' played for six or seven hours, settin' 'em up for the house once in awhile by way of a kitty, but none of 'em git-tin' much ahead. Just naturally the boys all stayed. I don't never give 'em too much credit when they're broke, for fear of encouragin' 'em in pernicious habits, an' they was a pretty dry lot. They was a-watchin' the game close, an' stood around tol'able close, but o' course not crowdin' the players. Ike stood a little behind Barlow, lookin' over his left shoulder, but o' course sayin' nothin'. We didn't s'pose he could see what cards was held, no more than the rest of us, for all three men was playin' close to their chests, as was

natural. It seems, though, that Ike has eyes consid'able better'n the average hawk, an' he was keepin' tabs on the game right smart.

"It come Jim Harris's deal, an' I noticed the stranger give a sort of a little start as he watched the cards droppin'. Then he looked at his hand an' I see his face change just the least little. He seemed to hesitate a little an' then he reached into his pocket an' pulled out his gun, an' laid it on the table alongside of his cards. 'It's kind of uncomfortable settin' on the end of it,' he says with a little grin, which we all understood well enough. Pete Barlow did, anyhow, for he dropped his cards on the table almost before he had lifted them, and flashed out his own gun. 'That's so. 'Tis uncomfortable,' he says, as he lays it on the table. Jim Harris, he warn't far behind, an' when he lays out his weapon he says, 'I might as well be in the fashion.'

"Just naturally we all understood what all that meant, but we warn't any of us expectin' what followed. It were fairly amazin'. Ike reached over in front o' Pete

Barlow an' grabbed his pistol, sayin' as he did so, 'You look after your playin', Pete. If there's goin' to be any shootin' done, I'll shoot for you.'

"Now I reckon there couldn't be no worse break made than that, an' I looked to see Pete break out in a blaze o' wrath, but I was clean flabbergasted when he looked up pleasant an' smiled an' said: 'All right, Ike.' I was clean flabbergasted an' I never understood the thing at all till Ike explained it to me afterward.

"'You see Harris had boxed the cards,' he says, 'an' the stranger seen it. That's why he pulled his gun. I seen that Pete had three tens an' a pair o' aces, an' I guessed the rest. Now, it was a clean plumb miracle, but I happened to have a ten o' clubs in my pocket o' the same pattern o' cards. It was one of a pack that dropped in the water an' I'd put it in my pocket. I didn't know why at the time, but now I can see it was the will o' heaven. I reached over an' took the gun just for an excuse to drop the card in Pete's lap. He seen it an' tumbled.'

“Well, that’s all there was to it. The stranger, he wouldn’t play the hand, o’ course, but Harris havin’ four sevens, laid for Pete, who just naturally stood pat an’ flashed four tens an’ an ace at the show down. That let Harris out, an’ Pete swatted the stranger till he had to borrow twenty to leave town with. An’ the credit of Arkansas City was saved.”



XIV

IT WAS A GREAT DEAL

"ONE o' the commonest failin's o' poor fallen humanity is a lack o' self-control," said old man Greenhut, as he turned back from the door of his tavern, out of which he had just thrown an unfortunate stranger, and walked around to his place behind the bar rubbing and slapping his hands together, as if to brush off some imaginary taint that might be supposed to have attached to the stranger's clothes.

The stranger, who didn't seem to be in good health, and was far from being well dressed, had shuffled in a few moments before and walked up to the stove with a deprecatory air, saying nothing to anybody and warming himself in an apologetic fashion as if he realized that he had no right to the heat and good cheer that radiated from the red-



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hot sides of that comfortable piece of furniture. Nobody said anything to him, and he coughed once or twice, timidly, before he ventured to walk over to the bar and accost the old man. "Squire," he said, "I am half-sick, an' I need a glass o' liquor powerful bad, but I hain't got any money. Kin you trust me for a drink? I'll pay ye for it, honest. I hain't never beat a man out of a cent in my life, an' I'll pay, sure. I wouldn't ask ye for it, on'y I'm reely sick."

The old man looked at him steadily while he was talking, but he answered never a word. Slowly he reached under the bar and the stranger's face brightened up. He thought the old man was reaching for a bottle. After hesitating a little the old man came out from behind the bar. Seizing the unresisting stranger by the collar he rushed him violently to the door, and half-threw and half-kicked him out. Then breaking the silence for the first time since the stranger's entrance, he delivered himself of the reflections recorded above as he walked slowly back to his place. He stood there for some minutes,

evidently thinking of what he had said, and then, business being slack for the moment, he relighted his cigar and came out again to his favourite seat by the window.

"Self-control," he said, presently, "is God's best gift to man. The fellow that kin always control himself under all circumstances is the one that's goin' to win the pot. Now take that ar shiftless bum that just come in here an' asked me to supply his necessities at my expense. If he'd 'a' had any self-control he never would have allowed hisself to be mastered by an accursed longin' for liquor without the price of it, an' if I hadn't 'a' had my self-control right along with me, like as not I'd 'a' let him have it. I've knowed men to do just such fool things. An' thar he'd 'a' been saddled with a debt that he wouldn't never 'a' paid, an' I'd 'a' been just that much out.

"I've often thought that the Lord must 'a' meant the game o' poker as a instrument o' savin' grace in the way o' cultivatin' those virtues 'thout which a man hain't fit to live, nor yet capable o' gettin' on in the world.

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Now poker'll teach a man self-control better'n almost anything else I know. You never seen a poker player what knowed the first principles o' the game, givin' way to no weaknesses.

"'Minds me of a game I see played once on the old *River Belle*, comin' down the river just after the spring floods o' '76. There wa'n't no such games then as there used to be before the war, or even for a few years after. I don't know what the reason is, but poker don't 'pear to be respected, now, like it used to be. 'Pears like the risin' generation hain't none o' the moral stamina that folks had when I was younger. Call poker immoral, I've heard tell, just as if 'twasn't the greatest educator an' highest moral training known to civilization.

"There was a good bit o' money up in that game, for there was four o' the nerviest men I ever knowed in it, an' every one of 'em was out for blood. Two of 'em, Jim Waters an' Abe Simpson, was St. Louis sports that always travelled together. Jim

Blivins was another. He come from Memphis, but he'd kind o' run hisself out o' town an' mostly travelled the river. 'Twarn't that he was crooked, partic'lar. He played as fair as most of 'em did, an' used to say that he never stacked the cards 'thouten he had reason to think that somebody else in the game was up to the same sort o' deviltry. But the truth was he played too strong a game for the Memphis crowd, an' it got so that nobody that knowed him would play with him, so just naturally he had to seek for new pastures an' strange lambs. The fourth man was a feller I never seed afore, though I come to know him well enough afterward. 'Twas George Dunning, a chap f'm somewheres up in Iowa that had took to the river for business an' somehow had struck up a friendship with Blivins. They was playin' partners at the time, though I didn't know it, an' just naturally they wasn't a-shoutin' it out from the housetops, the same bein' the upper deck in case of steamboats. Incidentally there was another feller in the game. He was a cattle-dealer from Texas, Dunni-

gan by name, that had just been up north sellin' a slew o' cattle, an' was goin' home with a wad that wouldn't fit comfortable in his inside pocket.

"The other four was just naturally intendin' to get hold o' that wad, but there was some difference of opinion amongst 'em about it. Waters an' Simpson was reckonin' on takin' it back to St. Louis with 'em, an' Blivins an' Dunning was thinkin' o' gettin' off at Memphis an' dividin' up there. What Dunnigan was figurin' on I don't know, but I reckon he expected to draw compound interest on his money durin' the time he was on the boat.

"By the time we got below Cairo the game was goin' on under a full head o' steam. The professionals was all well fixed for money an' there wasn't no small stakes played for. Nothin' was said about a limit, neither, nor there warn't no table stakes rules. It was just a case o' bettin' anything you damn please, an' either layin' down or makin' a bigger bluff every time the other feller peeped.

“White chips was a dollar, reds was five, an’ blues was fifty, makin’ a tol’able stiff game even with chips, but they was a good many hundred-dollar bills lyin’ on the table ’fore they’d been playin’ long, an’ there was a feelin’ among them that was lookin’ on that bigger money than that was liable to be flashed ’most any time.

“It was reely surprisin’, seein’ that the game was that sort, an’ the men playin’ was so much in earnest, that there was nothin’ decisive-like in the fust day’s play. You’d ha’ thought that somebody’d gone broke within a few hours, anyhow, but whether ’twas that they wasn’t in no hurry, seein’ they had several days ahead of ’em, or whether ’twas that they was too much for one another, I don’t know. Anyhow, they was a-playin’ from about four o’clock in the evenin’ till after midnight, an’ nobody was more’n five or six hundred dollars out that fust day.

“You see they all played cautious. I’ve often noticed that when men are playin’ in a real important game, with plenty o’ time to

play in, they'll play a much more cautious game than they will if there's only a few dollars, or a few hundred in sight. Anyhow, I didn't see no bet o' more than five hundred pushed up while I was lookin' on, an' that was most o' the time, an' I didn't see that called nor raised on'y once. Blivins put up five hundred once on three queens, an' Dunnigan, who had drawn one card, raised him five hundred, so Blivins just naturally laid down, seein' 'twas a jack-pot an' Dunnigan hadn't opened when he had a chance, but had raised once before the draw, showin' he had hopes of a flush or a straight.

"Well, as I said, they played till about twelve o'clock an' nobody was hurt much. Then Dunnigan said he guessed he'd turn in, an' nobody made any objections, only they all seemed to understand they was to go on with the game the next day.

"I must say that there Dunnigan was a foxy player. He laid down his cards a good many times that second day when an ordinary man would have played 'em, provin' conclusive. that he knowed the game. You

see he was reely better off in the game than he would have been if the other fellers hadn't been watchin' one another the way they was. Ef either two of the four had drawed out o' the game I don't reckon he'd ha' lasted more'n perhaps an hour or so, though as I said, he understood the game well enough, but just naturally he wasn't on to the reely subtle refinements o' scientific manipulation, an' any one o' them four could ha' stacked cards on him without him knowin' it. But the p'int was that Waters an' Simpson was watchin' Blivins an' Dunning with more anxiety than a hen gives to a brood o' ducklin's, and Blivins an' Dunning was returnin' the compliment most amazin' earnest like. Nary a one of 'em dasted to deal crooked, an' as for tryin' to ring in marked cards, any such trick as that would ha' just been suicide.

"After some hours' play the second day, though, all hands seemed to get impatient. 'Twa'n't that they played any less cautious, but they seemed to be gettin' on to one another's play better an' better all the time

an' feelin' as though they was justified in playin' to the strength o' their hands more'n they had. I noticed they begun callin' one another once in awhile, an' a call had been ruther a scarce thing before that. Dunnigan was caught bluffin' most outrageous once, on a busted flush, but nobody even smiled. Blivins had called him on two pairs, an' he raked in a pot of near a thousand dollars just as if nothin' had happened.

"All of a sudden came a most astonishin' deal. I reckon it was honest enough, for, as I said, they was a-watchin' one another like cats, an' slick as they all was, there warn't one of 'em but knowed the others would catch him if he tried to deal crooked. So just naturally we had to assume it was honest, anyway, although Dunning dealt the cards, an' he was one o' the best manipulators I ever see.

"What made it surprisin' was that the cards had been a-runnin' most almighty slow up to that time, as they will sometimes for a long spell. There had been a few good hands, o' course, but there hadn't been a real

struggle worth talkin' about in all those hours o' play. This time, though, there was struggle enough to satisfy the most sanguinary.

"Dunning dealt, as I said, an' Waters had the ace. He got four hearts with the ace and king at the head. Blivins was next player an' he caught three queens. Dunning was next an' he found kings and eights in his hand. Simpson was next an' he got four spades—little ones. An' Dunning dealt himself four ten-spots, pat.

"That of itself was a tol'able noteworthy deal, but the draw was still more astonishin'. They'd all come in as a matter o' course, an' Waters had just naturally raised it a blue chip. That give Dunning a chance, an' he raised it a hundred dollars. I asked him a long time afterward how 'twas he didn't raise the first round, an' he said he couldn't exactly say, on'y he had a sort o' hunch that Waters would raise, as he did, an' so give him all the better show. Everybody stood this raise also, and then they called for cards.

"Waters got his fifth heart. Blivins

caught the fourth queen. Dunnigan made a king full, an' Simpson got nothin'. Dunning, o' course, drew a dummy to his four tens.

"If ever there was a kettle o' fish that was. Blivins bet five hundred on the go off, an' Dunnigan raised him five hundred as a simple act o' Christian duty, havin' a king full against one two-card and three one-card draws. Simpson threw down his cards, havin' no chance to do anything else. Dunning just naturally put up a thousand dollars more, an' Waters was between the devil an' the deep blue sea.

"Just naturally he says to himself that Blivins an' Dunning was a-playin' whipsaw an' cal'latin' to scare him out right away. Dunnigan was the man he was after, same as the others was, an' he reckoned he could beat Dunnigan, but he didn't see how he was goin' to stand up against the other two. Talk about your self-control. There was a man that felt certain in his own mind that he had the winnin' hand when he reely had the poorest one in the game. He was low

man for fair, but you couldn't ha' made him think so just then. An' 'twas sharper than a serpent's tooth to see the other two fellers gettin' away with Dunnigan's money, as he could see they was likely to do.

"What did he do? Why, he throwed down his cards o' course, like a good player as he was. He knowed that, although the chances was that he had the best hand, he was goin' to have to play that hand so high that the three chances against him made it poor play to back it. An' mind you, 'twarn't honest play he was lookin' for, but a whip-saw game by two men with plenty of money an' more nerve.

"Blivins couldn't do no less than raise it another thousand, an' it was up to Dunnigan to make the play of his life. He thought he was makin' it when he saw both raises an' went two thousand better. I don't know but what I might ha' done the same thing, but I've played poker now longer'n I had then, an' I've seen four of a kind out a good many times. 'Pears to me like I'd ha' sensed some-thin' o' the sort when I see two good players

bettin' like them two did, an' one of 'em drawin' two cards an' the other only one.

"Anyhow, he raised, as I said, an' then o' course he was their cold meat. All they had to do was to wait on one another, so Dunning he raised an' Blivins chipped along. Dunnigan naturally thought he had one of 'em beat, an' he raised again, hoping to scare the other one out. He made his raise five thousand this time, as was entirely proper, seein' he'd made up his mind to bet, but he was considerable surprised when Dunning fingered his roll an' called for a show on two thousand, which was all he had left, an' then Blivins makes good an' goes him five thousand more.

"That was a little more than poor fallen human nature could stand. Just naturally he was certain that Blivins was bluffing, an' havin' more money in his pocket than was reely good for him, he makes another bluff hisself, havin', as I say, parted entirely with his self-control.

"Blivins was well fixed, too, though, an' he comes back at him again, so Dunnigan see it

was plump foolishness to raise any more, an' he called. I've heerd people criticize his play, sayin' that he'd either oughter laid down or raised again, but I'm free to say that I don't agree with 'em. A king full was good enough to call on, but nothin' short of a straight flush was good enough to raise on against Blivins's play, according to my notions.

"I've heerd people say, too, that they didn't believe Dunning dealt them cards honest, but I seen the expression on his face when Blivins showed down four queens against his four tens an' raked the pot. If he warn't genuinely surprised I never see any one that was.

"That broke up the game, for the cattle-dealer didn't want to go plumb broke an' he dropped out, so there wern't no use in prolongin' the struggle. But if ever a man had cause to be thankful for his self-control, Jim Waters had when he laid down his ace flush."



XV

HE SAT IN WITH A V

"I HEAR a lot o' talk," said old man Greenhut, as he wiped up the bar and set his bottles and glasses in order, "about modern progress an' the elevatin' influences of eddication, an' sich, but I'll be everlastingly hornswaggled if it don't appear to me that young folks nowadays is sure a degenerate lot. I don't mean boys, for there can't nobody tell what a boy's goin' to turn out to be. I've seen reg'lar milksops that went to Sunday school an' wore neckties, or, mebbe, played with their sisters up to the time they was seventeen or eighteen, turn all of a suddin like, an' develop into rip-roaring good citizens that could take their own part in anything that came along from a poker party to a political meetin', an' was a right down credit to the community. An' similar

I've seen right lively youngsters o' fifteen an' sixteen, that was full o' ginger and gave every promise o' bein' husky citizens, take to foppish ways by the time they was twenty, an' go around smokin' cigarettes. No, there ain't no tellin' about boys.

"What I mean," continued the old man, as he came around to his favourite seat by the window, "is the no-'count ways that the younger men of to-day seem to be fallin' into. Why, talkin' about cigarettes, there's grown men smokes 'em now, just as shameless as if they was smokin' honest tobacco in a pipe. An' I don't mean dagos and creoles an' sich, but full-grown men. An' what with temp'rance societies, an' the women tryin' to vote an' gettin' the men to uphold 'em in it, the country seems to be a-goin' hell to breakfast cross lots an' sideways.

"You don't see none o' the old style o' men scarcely. Forty year ago men was different. They wasn't afraid to drink four fingers to once o' good liquor, an' a word meant a blow an' a blow meant a shot. Con-

sequences was men was careful what they said, an' was a heap sight more polite. An' they played a man's game o' poker in them days. Nowadays they tell me the women is playin' it, an' it's got to be a reg'lar parlour amusement.

"Sam Nichols was in here only the other night an' somebody ast him to take a hand in a little game that was goin' on in the back room, an' he laughed an' says: 'No, I ain't a-playin' poker anywheres now 'ceptin' at home. My wife, she's learned the game an' some o' the neighbours comes in with their wives, an' we plays ten-cent limit. You have all the fun o' poker an' it don't cost nothin' to speak of.' An' Sam, he used to be one o' the stiffest players in Arkansas City.

"Just naturally, I was disgusted for fair. 'Yes, Sam,' I says, 'you can have all the fun o' poker if you leave out all there is in the game that makes it worth playin'. Certainly you can. An' you could have all the fun of eatin', too, if you was to take all your teeth out an' gum it on a piece o' sponge. But you wouldn't get no nourishment out of

it, I reckon. An' similar, I'd like to know what sort o' nutriment for a grown man there is in a ten-cent limit game. You sure make me sick.' "

The old man smoked in silence for a few minutes after he had got all this out and then began to chuckle. "It wasn't no ten-cent limit game they was playin' in here the night Park Halloway made his big haul," he said, still chuckling. "That was a grown man's game. The boys had been a little short o' money for three or four weeks, an' had got to playin' a table stakes game among themselves. You see there hadn't been no strangers in town since Three-finger Pete an' his pal come in an' done up the crowd with some marked cards they'd had sent here ahead of 'em.

"That was the slickest trick that was ever played on this community. Didn't you never hear of it? Why that was told all up an' down the river for years an' years. It 'peared that Three-fingered Pete was special sore on Arkansas City for doin' him up bad the first time he come here, an' he swore

he'd get even. So he waits a long time an' he gets in with a feller that dealt in cards wholesale. That feller was afterward shot, but we never caught Pete.

"Well, Pete managed to get a line on everybody in Arkansas City that bought an' sold cards. There was only three stores where they kept 'em, an' this feller that I'm tellin' about sold to all three. Well, Pete, he fixed up a set o' marks entirely original an' clever enough to fool the devil himself, an' for three whole years he marked every pack that came to Arkansas City, so's to be sure that no other kind o' cards would be in use in the town when he come. He was a good stayer, Pete was, an' he played a long game on this.

"After he was plumb certain that there wasn't no old stock left over in town, he drifted in one day, an' his pal followed next day. They was too slick to come together, or to let on that they knowed each other. Well, just naturally, when every pack o' cards in town was marked, an' only two men knowed it, and both o' them had been prac-

tisin' on readin' them marks till they knowed the backs as well as they did the fronts, them two men took away all the available cash capital there was in Arkansas City. It was a rich haul, an' everybody 'lowed that Pete was entitled to great credit for the way he worked it, though just naturally we was all pretty sore when we found it out, which we didn't till Pete an' the other feller had got away to Mexico.

"Well, as I was sayin', the boys was a-gettin' on the best way they could after that cyclone, an' playin' mumbletypeg amongst themselves with their odd change till some more strangers would come along an' give 'em a chance to git their money back. An' it had been goin' on that way for some weeks when it come that night I was tellin' of, that Park Halloway made his big play.

"It was a dispensation o' Providence, sure enough, that sent three cotton factors up f'm New Orleans just at that time. They was comin' up to dicker with some o' the planters for the next crop, there havin' been some difficulty in the market that had got a lot

o' planters dissatisfied, and these new factors had all sorts o' money with 'em. They was stoppin' over in Arkansas City to make some inquiries, an' just naturally they set into a little game while they was a-waitin' for the next boat.

"Jim Farley an' Dick Hackett had been playin' with 'em for about a hour when Halloway come in, an' naturally they had accumulated some wealth, so that the game was pretty healthy. It was table stakes, but there wasn't one o' the five that didn't have over a hundred in front of him, so when Halloway come in an' ast if he c'd have a hand we was some surprised. He'd been as near broke as anybody in town since Pete's raid, an' it didn't seem likely that he had money enough to set in with.

"So when he ast to set in, Hackett looked up a little doubtful an' says, 'Why, cert'nly, Park, but we're playin' table stakes,' an' he looked around at the money then in sight as much as to say, 'That sort o' lets you out, don't it?'

"But Halloway, he grinned an' says,

'That's the on'y game where I could get a show for my money, I reckon,' an' he sets down an' flashes a five-dollar bill as sassy as you please. 'I'll make it as quick play as I can,' he says, still grinnin', an' they all laughed an' pushed him over five white chips.

"Well, it was his age an' he antes a white chip as the others had been doin' an' let his cards lay face down till they'd all come in. Then, still without lookin' at his cards, he made his ante good an' shoved up the other three. One o' the factors sat next an' he saw. Then Hackett raised it five on the side, Halloway havin', o' course, a show for his money. The other two factors, Davis and Allen their names was, they was lookin' for trouble, so they come in, an' Farley, settin' next, h'isted it ten dollars.

"Course, Halloway hadn't nothin' to say, an' Smith, the first factor, he laid down. So did Hackett an' Davis, but Allen come back with ten more, an' Farley called it. Then Davis showed an ace high straight an' Farley a small flush. Halloway waited till they was

through, an' then he turned his cards over. They was a ten full on sixes.

"That sort o' gave him a footin' in the game, for he had, o' course, thirty dollars instead o' five, an' while Hackett was ten dollars out, Farley had won thirty dollars. The strangers was flush, anyhow, an' they wasn't a mite disturbed.

"It was Halloway's deal next, an' when it come his turn to see the ante he threw his cards away without lookin' at 'em. 'I'll bet the next hand,' he says, 'same as I did the last, an' I'd ruther not do it on my own deal.' So they played that hand without him, an' Hackett won it, with about forty dollars in the pot.

"Sure enough, in the next deal, Halloway shoved his thirty dollars in the pot without looking at his hand. Just naturally nobody thought he'd win again, so they bet as if he wasn't in the game. Smith an' Farley laid down, but Hackett an' Davis raised back an' forth till Hackett called for a show for his money. Allen stood one raise, but laid down on the second.

"Then came another surprise. Davis had three queens, Hackett had three kings, an' Holloway had three aces. He won ninety dollars on that deal, an' Hackett won something like a hundred an' fifty.

"When the cards was dealt next time there was a jack-pot, for they was a-playin' with a buck an' Hackett had it. They made it a five-dollar jack, an' Davis an' Allen an' Farley passed. That brung it up to Holloway an' he opened it for twenty-five dollars. Smith an' Hackett come in, Davis raised it fifty, Allen an' Farley come in, an' Holloway shoved up all he had which was forty dollars more. An' once more they all come in. I don't remember that I ever see anything just like it afore, but each man of the six drawed one card an' not one of 'em bettered his hand. Davis was raisin' on a four straight flush, king high, an', of course, wanted to play it as hard as he could, but the others was drawin' to four straights an' four flushes exceptin' Holloway, an' he had aces up.

"Then he was in the game with all four

feet, for he'd won more'n seven hundred dollars off'n his V-spot in three deals. We was all struck, but Park on'y grinned an' says, quiet like, 'Pears as though I'd struck my gait, don't it?' which it sure did.

"That warn't the end of it, though, for on the next deal, Allen having the age, an' Farley comin' in, Holloway simply made good with his little two dollars, waitin', as it appeared, for somebody else to raise. It was good play, too, for when it come Smith's turn he raised it ten dollars. The others all come in, an' Holloway raised it twenty-five. This kind o' staggered 'em, an' Hackett an' Farley, knowin' Holloway as well as they did, laid down, but the strangers all thought he was bluffin' on the stren'th of his run o' luck, an' all three of 'em made good. Allen drew three cards to a pair of aces. Holloway drew one, holdin' a kicker to three sevens, Smith drew two to three jacks, an' Davis, who was dealing, drew one to a four flush.

"Allen got his third ace, Holloway got his fourth seven, Smith didn't better, an'

Davis filled his flush, so if ever the Lord was good to a man, He cert'nly was good to Halloway. It was his first bet, Farley havin' passed out, an' he put up fifty dollars. Smith came in, figgerin' that some one else'd raise, which Davis did for fifty dollars more. Allen studied on his three aces for awhile an' then come in. I don't know what sort of poker he thought he was playin', but I reckon he thought Halloway an' Davis was both bluffin'. Just naturally Halloway come back with a hundred more, an' Smith an' Allen laid down, Davis callin'. That made seven hundred and ten dollars in the pot, of which four hundred and seventy-three dollars went to his profit an' loss account, makin' his winnin's up to this time one thousand one hundred and eighty-eight dollars, which was doin' well for a five-dollar bill in four pots.

"By this time the others was all proper astonished, an' Davis showed a little temper. He'd been hit pretty hard three times an' was aggravated, but Halloway never said nothin'. On'y just set there an' grinned,

an' once more the lightnin' struck in the same place. It was a short game an' a tol'able warm one.

"The next deal was Davis's, an' as Halloway had the first say he come in without lookin' at his cards. The next two men come in, an' Davis raised it fifty. That showed, o' course, that he was lookin' for fight, for there wa'n't but seven dollars in the pot up to then, an' nobody had showed any stren'th. Allen an' Farley looked over their cards pretty careful, an' findin' no encouragement they dropped.

"Then Halloway picked up his cards an' skint 'em down slow. The luck was still with him, for he had four treys. He was a cool player, though, an' pretended to be studyin' the cards, while he was really studyin' how to play Davis good and hard again. He knowed it was no good to think about the others, for they wouldn't be likely to stand Davis's raise, let alone his, if he should raise back. So he thought awhile an' then raised it a hundred.

"That made Davis madder'n ever. 'You

can't bluff me that way,' he says, very nasty, an' as the other two laid down, he come back with two hundred more. Then, o' course, Halloway had him. He looked more serious than ever for awhile, and finally he says, 'Well, I reckon I'll draw one card,' shovin' up his two hundred as he spoke.

"He let the card lay as it was dealt to him, an' Davis, havin' a pat flush, o' course, drew none. Halloway looked at him for a minute, as if tryin' to study out whether he was bluffin' or not, an' finally says: 'Well, I'll bet you five hundred, anyway.'

"'An' I'll raise you a thousand,' said Davis, with some sort o' French swearin' that I reckon he must ha' brought f'm New Orleans, f'r I never heerd anything like it around here.

"Halloway grinned again, an' he says: 'I'm sorry I can't see your thousand, but I'll call for a show for what I have, an' I reckon my cards is good.' An' he showed down his four treys.

"Well, that broke up the game. Davis was too mad to play any more, an' his pals



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see that it was foolish for them to stack up against any such luck as Halloway was settin' in. But it was a monstrous good game while it lasted. I never seen five dollars grow to two thousand three hundred and eighty-six quite so quick, afore nor since."

XVI

HIS QUEER SYSTEM

"'TAIN'T a matter of record," said old man Greenhut, with a reminiscent look in his eye, "that any stranger has ever come to Arkansas City with any notion o' doin' up the town what got away with the proposition an' any consid'able remnant o' the wad he had with him when he arrove. The citizens o' this town is mostly capable men, what is well qualified to drink red liquor straight an' set into 'most any sort of a game without drawin' weepsons, 'less there's some provocations, an' when it comes to draw-poker it's universally acknowledged up an' down the river that there ain't no superior game played anywhere. The galoot that comes here with a notion in his nut o' makin' a everlastin' fortune out o' such hands as a merciful Providence may allow him to hold

in two or three nights' play is gen'ly considered to be runnin' in great luck if he gets out o' town without havin' a subscription took up for his benefit about the time the next boat ties up.

"There has been a good many times, true enough, when things looked doubtful. Players has come that had new wrinkles in the way o' holdin' out, or stackin' the cards, or some new system o' play that puzzled the boys for awhile. An' there's been some come that sure knowed the game an' played it almighty skilful. But none of 'em, as I said, ever reely got away with the proposition.

"There was one feller, though, that showed up here about six years ago, that come monstrous near breakin' the record. That is to say, if he'd have understood the first principles o' poker he'd ha' busted the town wide open, an' the mortifyin' thing about it was 'twas poker he was playin'. That is, 'twas called poker, an' he sure did win, but the way he played it was one o' the seven wonders o' the world. We talked about it quite some, after he left, an' the

unanimous verdict was that if he ha' knowed what he was doin' an' how to do it, he'd ha' just everlastin'ly skint the entire crowd out o' what money there was, instead o' comin' out consid'able ahead, an' him not knowin' just how he done it or what he'd done. It sure were bewilderin', an' well cal'lated to make a man lose his faith in Providence, 'thout he was one that stuck to his religion spite of anything.

"The puzzlin' thing about it were that the feller seemed to be playin' poker all the time, an' the rest o' the party was playin' it for all they knew, but he were eïther playin' on a system that was entirely unbeknownst to everybody in this part o' the world, or else he were that outrageous ignorant o' first principles as would disgrace a half-grown boy. An' yet he won! Some of 'em was inclined to think at first that it were a new system, an' there was a good deal o' speculation on how it would work, played constant, but nobody had the nerve to try it, seein' it were plumb contrary to all science as poker is understood, an' they couldn't

get up that child-like confidence in heaven's mercy that would lead 'em to look for overwhelmin' luck in the matter o' cards at the critical moments o' the game.

"The way of it was this. He just landed from the boat one day an' walked up the levee a bit, lookin' round, an' sayin' nothin' to nobody. There didn't seem to be no reason for anybody to pay attention to him, an' consequent nobody did, for he wa'n't a man that looked like a sport, nor yet a business man. Just 'peared to have got out f'm somewheres an' didn't know his way back. After he looked round a spell, he sort o' drifted in to the hotel an' wrote his name, absent-minded like, on the register, an' said 'Yes' when the proprietor ast him if he wanted a room. Then he just sat round for a day or two, sayin' nothin' to nobody all the time. Didn't appear to have ambition enough to eat his meals, for he'd wait till everybody else was most through 'fore he'd go into the dinin'-room. An' even when he took a drink, which wa'n't often, he did it all alone without seemin' to take no interest in it.

"'Long about the third day he began takin' short walks, an' bimeby he got as far as to come in here an' look 'round. Seein' the bar, he called for some red liquor an' drank it, an' then seein' a chair he sot down. There hadn't been much doin' for a week or two, an' I says to Jake Winterbottom that it mought be a good idea to start a game o' poker. 'This here stranger,' I says, 'don't look as if he knowed one card from another, but 'tain't likely he's quite as simple as he looks, an' mebbe,' I says, 'you might get him into the game. Don't make it too stiff right away,' I says, 'an' who knows but you might get a small stake out of him? 'Tain't very promisin',' I says, 'but some men is like crooked cattle. There's more meat on 'em than they looks.'

"Well, Jake, he didn't think there was nothin' doin'. He looked the stranger over an' sort o' turned up his nose, but things was quiet, an' finally he says: 'I don't reckon he's got fifty dollars in the world, an' if we win that we'll only have to chip in an' send him away. There ain't the makings of a

citizen into him, no way I can figure it, an' we don't want him settin' around for ever. But we might take a shy at it, just to pass the time.'

"So him an' Sam Blaisdell an' George Bascom kind o' got together an' played a few hands, thinkin' the stranger might show some interest an' propose to join the game, but he never stirred. Just sot still an' chawed his tobacco, like he didn't give a cuss for nothin'. So finally Bascom he spoke up an' says: 'This is pretty slow playin' three-handed. We'd oughter have somebody else in the game,' an' they waited a minute to see if that would catch him, but he never even looked round. So Winterbottom says: 'Wouldn't you like to play?' an' the stranger he says: 'Yes,' just the same absent-minded-like way he'd spoke to the hotel proprietor, an' he went over an' sot in. I sold him ten dollars' o' chips, an' they dealt him cards. It were a table stakes game, an' each man had put up ten.

"The stranger, he talked like a Yankee an' looked like a Frenchman, but his name

on the hotel register was Dennis McCarthy, an' for all the interest he showed in the cards after he got 'em he might have been a Chineese. He just put up when it come his turn, an' drawed cards every time, but he never made a bet till his ten was all gone, an' then he bought ten more as calm an' collected as a knot-hole in a board fence.

"Well, we played along, if you can call it playing poker, just like that until his third ten-spot was gone, an' he bought ten more worth o' chips. Then he caught a hand that seemed to interest him some, for he studied it a long time after Bascom had bet ten on his cards before he said anything. Then he said, 'I call,' an' shoved a ten-dollar bill into the pot. They showed down an' the stranger had a pair o' queens. Bascom, he had three sevens, so he raked the pot, o' course, for Winterbottom an' Blaisdell had passed out.

"Well, that there McCarthy, if his name was McCarthy, just sat there and called every bet that was made after that for three-quarters of an hour. I never see such a thing before nor since. 'Peared like he'd on'y

just found out that he could call, an' he'd been playin' along afore that on the idee that all the other feller had to do to win the pot was to make a bet, an' as if he'd got in his head that callin' was all he was 'lowed to do under the rules. Whatever his fool notion was, I don't p'tend to say, but that's just what he did. Just called every time it come to him.

"Just naturally that looked easy, an' I will say for the boys that they didn't try to play it low down on him for a good while. All they did was to wait for a pretty strong hand an' then bet it for what it was worth an' wait for a call. As there was three o' them to one o' him, they naturally outheld him as a rule, but somehow or other he managed to scoop a pot just about often enough to keep him even. He'd bought twenty-five dollars after he lost his first fifty, so there was over a hundred on the table. The boys wasn't pushin' him very hard, so they only bet fives an' tens, an' once in awhile he'd show down the best hand an' scoop a pot. An' bimeby we was all surprised to see he was gettin'

ahead. Still, 'twa'n't no game to speak about. They'd all got the idee't he hadn't got much of a wad, an' they was playin' more for the fun o' the thing than to do him up.

"Pretty soon Blaisdell he caught a four-flush in a jack-pot an' the stranger he opened it. Blaisdell stayed an' the others dropped out. They each drewed one card an' the stranger he bet ten. Blaisdell looked at his draw an' found he'd filled a ace flush, so he raised it for his pile, which was thirty dollars, an' the stranger called. He showed down a full house an' Blaisdell had to go diggin'.

"Next hand Bascom opened the jack on a pat straight, an' the stranger he come in an' drewed one card. The others stayed out an' Bascom bet his pile, which was twenty odd, an' the stranger he called an' showed down a flush, so Bascom was obliged to dig.

"Then 'twas Winterbottom's turn, as it happened, an' he opened it on threes. They was playin' a jack again on account o' the hands showed, an' I'm blamed if the same thing didn't happen. The stranger he come

in an' drew two cards. Winterbottom bet his pile, havin' three queens. The other two dropped out an' the stranger he called an' showed three kings.

"It looked like a most amazin' run o' luck, but the stranger never turned a hair. He did call for the drinks all round, as a sort o' reco'nition, but he sot as calm as ever, waitin' for his cards, an' lookin' as if he didn't know what to do with 'em when they come. The others had bought fifty apiece when they come back, so there was money enough on the table to make it worth while, an' the play got stronger. First, Winterbottom he bet twenty on two pairs an' the stranger called on one pair. Then Bascom he bet ten on a pair o' queens an' the stranger called on ace high. Then Blaisdell bet twenty-five on three jacks, Bascom saw it on aces up, Winterbottom stayed out, havin' nothin', an' the stranger called on a nine-high straight. No matter what he held he wouldn't raise.

"Blaisdell kind o' got huffy this time, an' seein' the stranger was still pretty well to

the good, he began cussin' a little an' proposed to take off the limit. The others said they was willin', an' they ast McCarthy if he was, an' he said 'Yes.' Blamed if it didn't 'pear like 'yes' was 'most the only word he knowed in the language.

"Well, the bets was heavier after that, an' the stranger lost what he had in front of him in the next three pots, callin' on the most ridiculousest hands you ever see, but he stayed right along in for the next deal, so they knowed he must have more money in his clothes. It were his first say, Bascom havin' the age, an' he dug out two silver dollars an' come in, the ante bein' a dollar. The others stayed, an' McCarthy drawed three cards. When it come to the bettin', he bet a dollar, an' Winterbottom put up fifty, havin' filled a flush. Blaisdell dropped out an' Bascom raised it fifty. McCarthy never said a word, but he pulled out his wallet an' fished up a hundred-dollar bill. Winterbottom raised it fifty an' Bascom raised it fifty more, an' the stranger laid down another hundred.

“It looked like his finish there, for sure, for o’ course nobody thought he had much of a hand, an’ the boys thought all they had to do was to keep raisin’. They knowed he’d keep callin’, for he hadn’t done nothin’ else for nigh an hour, an’ all they had to do was to keep up the crisscross an’ whipsaw him out of his pile. ’Twa’n’t certain whether Bascom or Winterbottom would win, but one of ’em was sure to, an’ the money would stay right here.

“Well, they kep’ it up for five minutes, I reckon, till Bascom come to the end of his wad. He on’y had six or seven hundred in his clothes an’ Winterbottom wasn’t much stronger. It didn’t look worth while for Bascom to send for more money, for the stranger’s pocketbook was empty an’ he’d fished out his last hundred from one of his pockets, so Bascom just made good when Winterbottom raised, an’ the stranger got his chance to call, nobody supposin’ that he had more’n perhaps three of a kind, an’ likely not that, he havin’ called on every hand he held whether ’twas good for anything or not.

"It were a fatal mistake, an' Bascom seen it as soon as he'd done it, for the stranger dug again an' flashed up a thousand-dollar bill. 'Stead o' raisin' Winterbottom, as any other player on earth would ha' done, he just done his fool act over again an' called. Then he showed down four deuces an' scooped in the pot as cool as if 'twas eight dollars instead of a little over two thousand.

"Bascom sort o' gasped, for he seen what a mistake he'd made, but Winterbottom, he realized that somethin' had to be did quick, an' he reached out with one hand for the money. 'You never got them deuces honest,' he says, pullin' his gun, o' course, as he spoke. He knowed it meant fight, but he wasn't lookin' no more than any of us for the kind of a fight that came.

"McCarthy, he was quicker than chain-lightnin', an' reachin' over with one hand he grabbed Winterbottom's gun while he put the money in his pocket with the other. Then, with a queer sort o' a twist, he wrenched the gun out o' Winterbottom's hand and threw it plumb through the win-



**“‘WITH ONE HAND HE GRABBED WINTERBOTTOM’S GUN
WHILE HE PUT THE MONEY IN HIS POCKET WITH
THE OTHER.’”**



dow. We was all standin' ready to see that Winterbottom had fair play, not considerin' it etiquette to interfere unless he should get the worst of it, but, Lord bless you, he hadn't no show at all. The stranger he just rose out of his chair an' give a leap like a buckin' bronco clean over the table. He come down with both heels on Winterbottom's chest, an' Winterbottom was out of it. Blaisdell an' Bascom both drew on the instant, but 'twa'n't no use. That stranger was all over the room at once, swattin' Bascom behind the ear with his fist an' kickin' Blaisdell under the chin at the same time. I didn't think it was worth while to take a hand myself, seein' how things was goin', an' bein' some in years, so I stepped behind the bar an' waited.

"Well, them three men tried for a minit or so to get up, but they couldn't. McCarthy was on top o' the whole of 'em as fast as they moved, an' he had 'em all whipped in less time than it takes to tell it. I heerd afterward that he'd lived in Paris some, an' had learned some outrageous foreign way o'

boxin' with his feet that no Christian c'd ever stand up against. They all give in after a little, an' I didn't blame 'em, havin' seen for myself what the stranger c'd do.

"Well, that was the end of it. The stranger he walked out after the scrimmage was over, lookin' as cool as ever. He looked back when he got to the door an' says, 'Good night. See you again.' But we never did. He left town the next mornin' on an early boat. I've often thought, though, that it were a merciful dispensation that he didn't know enough poker to raise instead o' callin'."



XVII

AN EXTRA ACE

"SPEAKIN' by an' large," said old man Greenhut, as he bit off the end of a fresh cigar and settled himself in his favourite seat at the window, "there ain't no question but what the game o' draw-poker is about as nigh perfect as anything that was ever devised by the mind o' man, an' developed by the constant study o' countless generations. They say there ain't no record o' poker bein' played in former ages, an' that faro was played hundreds of thousands of years ago, when a feller named Faro was King of Egypt, but it stands to reason there ain't no truth in that. Like enough faro is a old game. I ain't a-sayin' nothin' against faro. It suits them that likes it, but it's gamblin', an' naturally it belongs to the heathen that started it.

" But poker's teetotally different. No such system as that of draw-poker ever grewed up in a night like Jonah's gourd, nor it wa'n't put together by no single set o' fellers. Stands to reason it's the crownin' development of all the civilization the world ever seen. An' it don't seem likely, now that the straight an' the straight flush has been discovered, an' universally recognized, that there's ever goin' to be no changes into the game. It's perfect as it is, an' there ain't no chanst o' makin' it any more perfect.

" An' yet there is times when even the best players is obliged to rely on outside influences to help 'em out o' some great emergency o' the game. That ain't no fault o' the game, for as I said, the game is all right, but it goes to show that a man as relies on on'y one thing is goin' to get left when he stacks up against some feller that relies on the same thing an' has something else up his sleeve besides. An' that there somethin' else is got to be more'n a knowledge o' cards.

" O' course if a man reely understands the game as he'd oughter, an' can handle the

cards so's to give himself what he needs in the draw when it comes to a desprit struggle between him an' the other feller, an' can read the backs o' the cards well enough to have a good general idee o' what the other feller is holdin', why he can worry along under ordinary circumstances so's he can hold his own most o' the time, an' make enough over from time to time to pay his livin' expenses. But that's all a part o' draw-poker, same as it's a part o' the game not to be found out when you're obliged to change the natural order o' the cards. There is folks that has prejudices against them things, an' if a man is clumsy enough to get found out, why, o' course he's goin' to get hisself in more or less trouble, but I maintain so long as they're done slick enough to not be seen, they are as legitimate as anything else in draw-poker. That's the way Arkansas City has come to have the reputation it has. There's some o' the slickest players on the river right there in that town, an' nobody has ever caught 'em usin' marked cards, or holdin' out, or dealin'

out o' the middle or off'n the bottom of the deck.

"But what I mean about outside influences is entirely different. There comes a time, sometimes, when a man is obliged to think quick an' act quick in order to keep some unscrupulous stranger from sweepin' away all his hard-earned winnin's in one fell pot. At such times even a thorough knowledge o' poker ain't a goin' to save a man thouten he's quick enough to think an' has sand enough to act on the instant.

"There was an instance o' that in Arkansas City the time when Hank Fairfax an' his side-partner, Billy Overton, come up here from Vicksburg to do up the town, an' come so near doin' it. It were a great night, an' on'y for Sam Pearsall's presence o' mind an' prompt action I reckon we'd ha' lost prestige right then an' there.

"There couldn't no one find fault with Hank an' his partner, for they come in like men an' said, open an' above board, just what they'd come for. Hank put it kind o' brutal, but he was fair an' square about it. He said:

'We Vicksburg sports is plumb tired hearin' about Arkansas City poker, an' Billy an' I has come to give you jays a few lessons on how the game reely ought to be played. If any of you has the sand to play up against the real thing, now's your time, but this ain't no crossroads proposition. We are out for the stuff an' we propose to carry it back with us.'

"Well, you know there ain't nobody from nowhere that can let out a yawp like that in Arkansas City without bein' took up sudden. 'Twa'n't eight minutes by the clock after he'd peeped, afore him an' Billy an' Sam Pearsall an' Jake Winterbottom an' Joe Bassett was sittin' 'round the table countin' out their chips. They each put up a thousand an' made it a table stakes game. 'We didn't come here to play old maid,' said Billy, when somebody asked what the game should be. 'Let's have somethin' worth playin' for,' he says, an' they was all agreed.

"Well, just naturally they all played right up under their collar buttons at first, bein' anxious to get on to one another's play.

There hadn't none of our boys even played with Fairfax, but they all knowed him by reputation as one o' the slickest players in Mississippi, an' they wa'n't takin' no chances on his deal. Overton we didn't none of us know much about, 'ceptin' he had the name o' bein' a cool hand in a quarrel and a bad man in a fight. We knowed he played poker, course, just as everybody does, but we hadn't heard o' his bein' counted no crack player, such as Hank would be sure to have with him, an' we was a little slow, too, about sizin' him up, not knowin' what his particular graft might be.

" Bein' for them reasons a trifle more cautious than usual, the boys, as I said, was slow about startin' in, an' any way the cards ran small for awhile, but all of a sudden there was somethin' doin' on Winterbottom's deal. It was a jack-pot with thirty dollars in it, an' Hank havin' first say, opened it for thirty. Pearsall, he came next an' he come in. Bassett was the next player an' he raised it thirty. Overton made it thirty more and Winterbottom h'isted it fifty. Fairfax raised it a hun-

dred an' Pearsall says: 'I didn't want to raise it the first time round for fear o' scarin' some of ye out, but as long as I've got you all hooked,' he says, 'it'll cost ye two hundred more to draw cards.'

"Just naturally I was lookin' for some of 'em to drop out after that kind o' play, but every one of 'em stayed. There wa'n't no more raisin' done. I reckon they all thought four hundred an' forty dollars apiece was enough to put up before the draw, which sure it was in a game o' that size.

"When it come to the draw there was another surprise. Every man at the table stood pat. Well, just naturally it were pretty thin ice to dance on, an' nobody seemed to know for a minute or two just how to bet, havin' nothin' to guide him but his own hand and the fact that there was four pat hands out against it.

"Fairfax, o' course, knowed just what to do. He put up a white chip. There was no doubt about his havin' a chance to play later, an' he were easy. Pearsall studied a bit, but finally he decided to wait, too, havin' de-

clared hisself before the draw, so he chipped along. Bassett wasn't raisin', neither, for he knowed Pearsall's play pretty well, an' havin' only a small flush he didn't feel strong, so he chipped along.

"That brought it up to Overton again, an' he, thinkin', I reckon, that it was up to him to help Fairfax along whether his own hand was good or not, put up a hundred dollars. It were a queer bet, but I sized it up for the beginnin' of a seesaw in case Fairfax should want one. That might not ha' been what was in his mind, but I reckon 'twan't far out o' the way.

"Winterbottom seen the raise. He were lookin' for more developments, an' he wa'n't ready to play his hand very strong till he found out what was doin'. It were extra cautious play all round, with the advantage lyin' between Fairfax an' Pearsall, but mostly on Pearsall's side.

"Fairfax put up two hundred an' I seen he were ready for a seesaw. I don't know what might ha' happened if there'd been more money on the table, but Pearsall saw his op-

portunity an' grabbed it. He counted his chips an' findin' six hundred in front of him, threw it all in the pot.

"Bassett throwed down his flush like a man, an' Overton called for a show for his pile, which wa'n't quite big enough for a call. That put it up to Winterbottom, an' he skinned his hand over again, thinkin' mighty hard. He had a full hand an' money enough to raise. An' more than that, he'd dealt the cards hisself, so he wa'n't worried none on that account, but finally he just made good. He said to me afterward, 'I would ha' raised,' he says, 'but I reckoned Fairfax was goin' to raise again, an' the others was all in, so I gave him the chance.'

"But Fairfax was as rattled as the rest of 'em was, an' he only called. Then it come out that there was two flushes an' two fulls in the game, not reckonin' the flush that Bassett had throwed down. Winterbottom's flush beat Overton's, bein' ace high, an' Pearsall's ace full o' course beat Fairfax's jack full.

"It were a body blow for fair. Fairfax an' Overton seen they'd overplayed their

hands, an' they was sore enough to make a beef about it, on'y they knowed it were too late. There wa'n't nothin' to say, 'thouten they'd kicked on Jake's dealin', an' they couldn't do that after they'd played the hand an' lost. The on'y thing they c'd do was to quit or put up again. They wa'n't quittin', so they put up another thousand apiece an' played along. Bassett had chips left an' Pearsall was on velvet.

"There wa'n't no heavy play again right away, but luck run to the Vicksburg fellers for awhile, so's't they picked up a few hundred in the next half-hour, mostly on pots they raked in without a call. Our boys was playin' as careful as they was an' was layin' for a chanst at 'em.

"Bimeby then comes a hand where Fairfax an' Bassett did some crisscross business. Bassett had been playin' close f'm the first, an' he had pretty near all o' his original wad left, spite o' what he'd lost on that flush, so when he caught three deuces on Pearsall's deal an' it were a jack-pot that had been pretty well fattened, he just opened it for

fifty without much fear o' the consequences. All the others laid down except Fairfax, an' he come in on a pair of aces. He took three cards, but Bassett only drewed one. 'Twa'n't extry good play, for his threes wa'n't big enough to play 'em very strong 'thouten he was goin' to bluff, an' he might better ha' drewed two cards, relyin' on Fairfax thinkin' his threes was bigger'n they was, but luck was with him in the draw 'n' he catched the other deuce.

"Just naturally he felt good, an' thinkin' mebbe Fairfax might ha' bettered an' might raise, he throwed in a chip.

"Fairfax fumbled his cards a minute afore he picked 'em up. I don't know whether he were a-studyin' or whether it were a accident, but everybody noticed it, an' it were lucky they did, as things turned out. But when he did pick up his hands he smiled a bit an' throwed two fifty in the pot.

"That were just what Bassett were looking for, an' he shoved all his chips to the centre o' the table without countin' 'em. O' course Fairfax couldn't raise no more; but he

counted up, an' findin' it took six hundred to call, he called.

"Bassett showed down his four deuces an' says: 'I reckon that's good,' an' he reached for the pot, but Fairfax says, 'Hold on. That's a pretty good hand, but aces'll beat it if you have enough of 'em,' and he showed down four aces.

"Right there was when Sam Pearsall showed his resources. O' course, so fur as poker goes, that is, so fur as the reglar game goes, Fairfax won the pot all right, but, as I was sayin', there is things outside o' the reglar game that a man can rely on in a emergency if he's quick to think an' quick to act, an' Sam were always as quick as a cat.

"I don't know how it happened that Sam had a ace o' diamonds hid away somewheres, but they'd changed the deck several times, an' I reckon he must ha' thought it might come in handy to figger on, or somethin' o' that sort. Anyway, he had it, an' it were the same pattern back as the deck they was playin' with. So he speaks up quick. 'Hold on you,' he says. 'There's somethin' wrong

here. I discarded the ace o' diamonds,' he says, an' reachin' over quick, he turns the discard pile face up, an' spreadin' out the cards, sure enough there were the ace.

"O' course that queered Fairfax's hand right away. They counted the cards, an' sure enough there were fifty-three cards in the deck. Just naturally Fairfax an' Overton smelled a mice, an' they called on me to bring back the cards I'd gathered up every time they'd called for a new deck, an' I did it.

"They picked out the deck o' the same pattern they was usin' an' counted that, an' just naturally they found fifty-one cards in it, but no ace o' diamonds. It was clear enough where the card had come from, but the question was how it come where it was, an' there was no way o' tellin' whether the missin' card was the one that Fairfax held in his hand, or whether it was the one that Pearsall had showed in the discard pile.

"There wa'n't much said. Everybody remembered how Fairfax had fumbled his cards, but nobody cared to say nothin' about

it, for there wa'n't no use o' havin' to fight with a man like Fairfax when Overton was along, specially as the pot had to be divided anyhow. It were a foul deck beyond a question, and there wa'n't no dispute when Bassett took back his chips.

"Fairfax were mad clear through, though. He didn't say much, but he got up an' reckoned he didn't care to play no more in a game where four aces wa'n't good. It wa'n't really what one would have expected from a dead game sport such as he had the name o' bein', but we had the satisfaction o' seein' him an' Overton go back to Vicksburg without makin' their bluff good, even if they didn't leave their money behind 'em.

"Which goes to show, as I said, that there is times when a man has to rely on outside influences even in playin' poker."



XVIII

PLAYED BY THE BOOK

“THERE’S a powerful lot o’ people in this here world,” said old man Greenhut, as he rinsed out a couple of whiskey-glasses and set them away, “that seems to think they is app’inted by a all-wise Providence to set other folks right. It don’t seem to make no difference what’s done, or who does it, or how it’s done, they’re always ready to chip a lot of advice into the pot, an’ tell ’em how they’d oughter done it different.

“Mostly such folks is born fools an’ don’t know no more about things in general than a hound pup in the wilderness knows about the plan o’ salvation, but you couldn’t make one o’ ’em realize what a fool he is if you was to cut his head open an’ try to squirt sense into it. What’s this the Good Book says? It’s somethin’ about if you pound

a fool up in a mortar and shoot him out with the bombshells, yet will not his folly depart from him.

“There hain’t nothin’, as I said, but what critters like them will try to put right accordin’ to their own notions, an’ the result, so far as I’ve ever seed it, is tol’able certain to be a mixup of the worst sort. An’ when they gets into a game o’ poker there’s more bad blood stirred up in a hour than good, steady play for six months’d be likely to bring up. Sometimes it’s on’y nasty words, an’ sometimes it’s a gun-play. But when such a critter gets hold o’ one o’ these here poker manuals such as I seed the other day that’s just been published in the East, an’ undertakes to make a civilized community swaller his raw notions just because some feller that never played poker on the Mississippi has had ’em printed in a book, he can just about cover the underside o’ the sky with cobwebs o’ perplexity spun out o’ the brains o’ good men that gets bewildered listenin’ to ’em.

“The way I come to see this here book

I'm tellin' about was through a little game that the boys got up last week to oblige a travellin' Easterner that stopped over for a few days to look at some plantations up the river a bit, that was offered to a British syndicate at a figger that wouldn't ha' paid more'n 100 per cent. profit to the owners if the deal had went through. They said this here Wanderin' Willie boy was some sort of a big-bug in business matters when he was to home, an' he was travellin' in cogs, whatever them is. Anyway, he didn't want nobody to know who he was, an' he was called Mr. Hapgood when he was travellin', an' the keeper that had him in charge treated him as if he was made o' glass. Hapgood called him his valet, an' ordered him round like he was a hired man, an' the keeper never made no fuss at all about it.

"Hapgood was pokin' round town askin' all sorts o' questions of everybody, an' some o' the boys referred him to me for general information, so he come in that evenin' an' chinned with me for half an hour. He bought liquor for the house two or three

times, an' somehow or another there was quite a crowd in here after the first round. I seen there was some o' the crack players in the place, an' it kind o' reminded me o' the popularity o' the game here, so when Hap-good ast me, as he did, what the leadin' industries o' Arkansas City was, I mentioned draw-poker among 'em. He kind o' laughed as if I'd said somethin' funny, an' said he hadn't been in the habit o' thinkin' of it as a industry, but he'd given considerable study to the game an' had come to the conclusion that it was just about the real thing. I ast him if he played it much an' he said no, not exactly, but him an' four or five o' his friends had got hold o' this here manual, as he called it, an' had practised quite a lot, so's't he considered himself a first-class player.

"Well, just naturally I gave him to understand that we had some players in town that we thought was able to hold up their end against any ordinary player, an' that they would consider it a privilege to make up a game most any time if they could get a first-class player to give them points.

They was always anxious to learn, I said, an' if he would like to get the benefit of a little practice, I thought they would arrange it so's't he could have the opportunity.

"You'd ha' thought he was a bullfrog jumpin' for a piece o' red flannel if you'd ha' seen how quick he took it up. He was more than ready, an' the boys seein' how eager he was kind o' hung back to be coaxed, but old Jake Winterbottom, he pleaded with 'em till he got Jim Blaisdell an' Sam Pearsall an' Joe Bassett to set in with him an' make a five-handed game.

"They set down at the table as they was in the habit of doin', just takin' any old place that happened, an' Hapgood he says, kind o' surprised, 'We'll have to cut for choice o' seats, won't we?'

"The boys was more surprised than he was, and Winterbottom, he says, 'I don't see no objection to that, but if anybody has any choice o' seats he can have it as fur as I'm concerned. I don't see no use o' cuttin'.'

"'Well,' says Hapgood, 'the rules says we must cut for choice. You're goin' to play

accordin' to the rules, ain't you? As I understand it, poker ought to be played strict under the rules.'

" 'You're dead right on that, stranger,' says Joe Bassett, givin' Winterbottom a kick in the shins under the table. 'You can bet this game is goin' to be played accordin' to rules if I'm in it. An' it won't be healthy for the man that breaks the rules.'

"So they cuts for choice o' seats, and Pearsall cut low. That give him the choice o' seats, and he said he'd set where he was. Winterbottom was next lowest man an' he said he'd set where he was, too. He was suited well enough. But Hapgood, he spoke up again an' he says that won't do. The second lowest man must set next on the left o' the low man, an' the third lowest next on his left, an' so on.

"Winterbottom started in to cuss a little, not because he cared a cuss, but just because he was surprised, but he got another kick in the shins, an' takin' a sudden tumble to hisself, he jumped up an' took his proper seat. When they'd all got seated again Joe

Bassett ast in a general sort o' way what good all that did, an' Hapgood says, 'Why, that's one o' the laws in the International Code. You have to do it before you play or else the game wouldn't be regular.'

"'That's right,' says Joe Bassett. 'We must play by the rules, but, stranger, we ain't exactly posted on this here International Code. We play the old Mississippi River rules, the Mississippi River bein' the place where the game was born an' grewed up. If there's a International Code we'd like to know about it, an' if you'll tell us all about it as we play, we'd think it monstrous kind o' you.'

"Well, Hapgood says he'll do it with pleasure, 'n' he spoke to his keeper an' tells him to go over to the hotel an' get the manual out of his portmanteau. 'The code is in that,' he says. So the keeper he starts, an' the boys cut for deal accordin' to custom, an' Jake gets it. He shuffles an' offers the deck to Pearsall, who sits on his right, to cut, but Hapgood speaks up an' says that ain't right. 'The ante man is the man that

cuts the cards,' he says. 'I don't know as it makes any great difference,' he says, 'who cuts 'em, but that's what the book says.'

"Winterbottom, he's gettin' a little bit old, an' he's kind o' sot in his ways, an' I c'd see that he was gettin' sort o' rattled, but before he c'd say anything, Bassett, he spoke up again. 'It don't really make no difference, I reckon,' he says, 'but if the book says that the ante man must cut, why, he's goin' to cut. On'y you see, stranger, we hain't familiar with that book an' we been in the habit o' lettin' the feller on the dealer's right cut the cards. It's on'y our ignorance, you know. We're willin' to learn better.' An' he, bein' the age himself, reaches over and cuts the cards.

"Jake, he kind o' shakes his head a little, but he don't say nothin' an' he starts to deal, but Hapgood he speaks up again. 'Before we start,' he says, 'we must have it understood whether we are going to play any of the variations in the game. We play straights, don't we, and straight flushes?'

"'Oh, yes,' says Bassett.

“‘And straights beat three of a kind, don’t they?’

“‘Well, yes,’ says Bassett, ‘they commonly do, when you get ’em.’

“‘And blazers, do we play them, and jumpers? And do we play with a joker?’

“Bassett was puzzled for a moment, an’ before he could get started Winterbottom busted loose. ‘No!’ he hollered, just like he were mad. ‘No, we don’t play with a joker, nor big an’ little casino, nor right and left bower, nor his nobs, nor his heels. We play draw-poker. An’ we don’t play blazers nor jumpers, because we don’t know what they are and we don’t care a darn. We wouldn’t play them if we did know.’

“‘Well, well,’ says Hapgood, ‘that’s all right. I only asked because they’re in the book, and we have to know, you know, before we play, you know.’

“‘Well, we know,’ growled Jake and he started to deal again. While he was dealing Bassett put up his ante an’ Hapgood, who set next, he says, ‘I straddle,’ an’ throws in two chips. That makes it four to play,

an' Blaisdell he throws down his cards. Pearsall comes in an' so does Winterbottom. Bassett makes good an' Hapgood raises it eight. They was playin' table stakes.

"Pearsall, havin' next say, he says, 'I raise you eight,' an' shoves up his chips.

"'Oh!' says Hapgood, speakin' up quick. 'Then you don't play the doublin' game?'

"'What in thunder is the doublin' game?' says Pearsall.

"'Why you can't raise less than double what the last bet was,' says Hapgood.

"'Is that in the book?' asked Bassett, sudden like.

"'Yes,' says Hapgood.

"'Then we play it,' says Bassett very determined.

"'Well,' says Pearsall, 'I raise you sixteen chips.'

"Winterbottom he studies for a minute an' he says, 'I'll come in,' but he says it kind o' slow.

"It were Bassett's turn next, an' he says, 'I raise it thirty-two chips.'

"Things was gettin' interestin' about then.

It were quick poker even for Arkansas City, an' I looked to see some layin' down, but they all had pretty good cards as it happened an' they all made good. In the draw Bassett took one card, Hapgood took two, Pearsall stood pat, an' Winterbottom took two.

"Then they all waited for a minute or so, an' finally Winterbottom says to Hapgood, 'It's your bet.'

"'Oh, no,' says Hapgood, 'it isn't my bet, I straddled.'

"'Well, what in blue blazes has that got to do with it?' says Pearsall.

"'Why, if I straddled I get the age,' says Hapgood, an' the boys was struck dumb for a minute or so.

"Finally, Bassett he caught his breath, an' he says, 'Is that in the book?'

"'Why, certainly,' says Hapgood, an' just then his keeper come in with the book in his hand. It was a monstrous pretty little red book, too, with a fancy cover an' gilt edges on the leaves.

"Well, Bassett he were gettin' sort o' weak by this time, but he managed to say, 'I ain't

doubtin' your word, stranger, but this here is kind o' strong liquor for us. We ain't used to it. Don't you think you're mistaken? Do you think that any man that knowed enough about poker to write a book about it would put that in?'

"'Well, it's right here,' says Hapgood, opening the book. 'It's law 44 in the International Code. You'll see it on page 100. It says: "The straddle transfers the age from the ante man to the straddler,"' and he read it and showed it.

"The boys looked at one another for a little, as if nobody could say anything, an' I reckon they couldn't right away, but finally Bassett he spoke up, an' he says: 'We've started to play this here game accordin' to the rules, an' I reckon we'd better see it through for one deal, anyhow. Pearsall, it's your bet.'

"Pearsall he looked kind o' faint, but he throwed in a chip, an' Winterbottom seed it, an' Bassett he come in, an' Hapgood he raised it ten. Then the boys seen their duty, an' they done it for fair. The chips was a

dollar, an' Pearsall he raised it twenty, an' Winterbottom he raised it forty, an' Bassett he raised it eighty, makin' about half a million dollars on the table. Hapgood he throwed down his cards, an' Pearsall an' Winterbottom did likewise, so nobody found out what anybody had.

"The next deal was about the same story, on'y they all come in, an' after they'd coaxed Hapgood along till he'd put up a fair-sized stake, they doubled upon him four times instead of three, an' he throwed down again.

"That brought it up to Hapgood's deal, an' I reckon he must ha' been a little rattled, seein' how he wa'n't likely to get much of a show, for instead o' dealin' cards to all five players he on'y dealt out four hands. O' course, they all seen what he was doin', but they kind o' watched him to see if it wa'n't some new sort of a trick out o' that book o' his'n, an' when he finished nobody moved to pick up his cards. An' still Hapgood didn't seem to notice nothin' out o' the way, so Bassett spoke up very mild an' subdued like. 'Ain't that a misdeal, stranger?

You haven't dealt Winterbottom any cards. He's in the game, ain't he? "

"Then Hapgood seen what he'd done an' picked up the deck again. 'Oh, no,' he says, 'it ain't a misdeal. I'll give him a hand,' and he dealt him one card off the top of the deck, another off the bottom, the next off the top, the next off the bottom, and the next and last off the top.

"Then Winterbottom turned to me an' says: 'Greenhut, I wish you'd bring me a drink o' red liquor. I think I'm going to faint.' I brought it to him quick, for he did look pale, an' he ain't as young as he was. After he'd swallowed it he says to Hapgood: 'What in blue blazes is that sort o' monkey business you was just puttin' up? Is there anything in that extraordinary thing you call a book that says for you to do a thing like that? "

"'Why, certainly,' says Hapgood. 'You'll find it in law 34 of the International Code, on page 98. "If too few hands have been dealt or a player has been omitted, the dealer shall supply the omission by dealing the

necessary number of cards alternately from the top and bottom of the pack." There it is. You can read it for yourself.'

"And he handed the book to Jake. Jake took it and looked at it curiously while the rest of us looked over his shoulders. The rule was there and so were the other things he told us about. And the book was published by some firm in London and another firm in New York. It looked like a sure enough book. It even had the author's name printed as Templar. I was almost stunned. I couldn't think of anything to say. Neither could the rest of the boys for a few minutes, but finally Jake handed the book back to Hapgood an' he says, mighty serious like, 'I don't find no fault with you, stranger. You mean well, an' I don't reckon you're the man that wrote this book, but I want to give you a little good advice. If you're thinkin' o' playin' poker much while you're in the country, an' think o' takin' that book along with you, the best thing you can do is to take out an all-fired big policy o' life insurance. Your heirs, if you have any, is liable to get

rich monstrous sudden that way. As for me, I think I'll cash in. I'm open to play draw-poker at any time, but this here game is too rich for my blood.'

"An' that broke up the game. I don't know whether they really do play any such poker as that book tells about in the East, but 'tain't never likely to be played in this country. It does beat all how some folks can get things printed, but I remember hearing it said once that it stood to reason that nobody would ever write a book on how to play poker if he knowed, 'cause if he knowed he'd play enough not to need to write for a livin'."



XIX

ONLY ONE SURE WAY TO WIN

“’PEARS to me,” said old man Greenhut, as he leaned his elbows on the bar and pulled viciously at a very black cigar to keep it alight, “like there was a monstrous lot o’ foolishness talked about the game o’ draw-poker. Fellers’ll tell you with tears in their mouth about gettin’ beat at the game an’ about the hard mess of luck they have an’ how some other player’ll always hold over ’em or pull out against their pat flushes an’ wipe up the floor with ’em when they’d oughter have the pot cinched according to all laws. Oh, there ain’t no end to hard luck stories. They’re thicker than cold molasses, but there hain’t no sense into ’em. O’ course, a man may get hit hard now an’ again when he ain’t lookin’ for it—he may get kicked by a mule sometimes when he

thinks he's out o' the mule's reach; but a man that gets kicked all the time is either a jackass or else he don't know mules.

"So with poker. No man that knows poker is goin' to get beat at it all the time, an' the man that does get beat nine times out o' ten beats hisself. 'Tain't the other fellers' play half as much as it is takin' fool chances that makes men walk home 'stead o' takin' the cars. There's a heap o' talk about one man playin' better poker than another man, but my experience tells me that the principal trouble is not that one man plays better than another, but that one man don't play so well as another. An' it stands to reason that when a man don't play as well as the other feller he's goin' to beat hisself.

"There was Jake Winterbottom," continued the old man, as he straightened himself up and walked around to his favourite seat by the window. Winterbottom wasn't in the room at the time, or probably Greenhut would not have mentioned him by name.

"There was Jake Winterbottom. Jake is a powerful good player now, an' I reckon

he can hold his end up in the most select circles. He's played steady with the best talent of Arkansas City for a good many years, an' any man that can do that don't have to have no trepidation about settin' in with the best of 'em.

"But I remember the time when Jake was about the easiest proposition there was to be found all up an' down the river. 'Peared like there wa'n't no possible way o' losin' money at the game that he hadn't studied out an' practised till he had 'em all down pat. He c'd lay down three of a kind against aces up with the same monotonous regularity that he'd bet a straight against a full. An' he didn't have no sense about the draw. He'd pull for a flush every time he got four of a suit, an' sometimes when he had only three, no matter what the odds was in the bettin'. An' when he did happen to have the winnin' hand, if he bet it at all, which he wouldn't half the time, he never got nothin' to speak of out of it.

"I used to reason with him. There wa'n't no reason as I know on why I should, for

he wa'n't nothin' to me, more'n a fair, average customer, but somehow or other I allus cottoned to Jake f'm the time he struck the town till he'd come to be recognized as one o' the leadin' citizens. 'Peared like he made a impression on me f'm the first. Anyway, I felt kind o' sorry to see him everlastin'ly buckin' up ag'in a game that was too much for him, an' I told him so, many's the time.

" 'Jake,' I used to say to him, 'you hain't no business playin' with the Arkansas City crowd. They'll do you, sure.' But he'd always say: 'Greenhut, I'm learnin', an' learnin' is allus expensive. One o' these days I'll do 'em.' So I let him alone.

" 'Peared like he learned all of a sudden. He'd been pikin' along, playin' a fiddlin' game whenever he got a chance to stick his nose in, but givin' no evidence o' talent till this one night, when there was two strangers come in to do the talent. Jake was here an' he had about seven dollars in his clothes when they made up a table stake game an' each man put up fifty dollars. There was six playin', too, so there was three hundred

dollars on the table when they started. Jake, he looked on for awhile an' never peeped. Didn't think he'd be let in an' consequent said nothin' till three of the home talent dropped out, busted. That left Sam Pear-sall playin' agin the two strangers, an' he were nervous. He wa'n't much more'n holdin' his own, an' he looked round to see if there wasn't somebody to set in. Joe Bassett an' Jim Blaisdell was willin' enough, but they had no money left, an' Jake seein' how things stood, he spoke up kind o' timid like, an' he says: 'I don't reckon I'd last more'n a few minutes, but I'll take a hand if you'll let me play for what I've got.'

"Sam spoke up quick an' says, 'I hain't no objections,' an' the two strangers says, kind o' careless, 'Oh, that's all right,' so down he sets. But they was disgusted enough when they seen what his pile was. He dug up seven dollars an' two bits, an' bought his chips an' took a hand.

"It were a dollar jack an' one o' the strangers opened it for four dollars, an' Jake he throwed down. The stranger he win it,

an' the next deal it were Jake's ante. He put up two bits, call four, an' the others all come in an' he wouldn't make good. That left him just six dollars, but it were his deal.

"When I seen that deal I kind o' says to myself that mebbe I'd sorter mistook Winter-bottom, an' mebbe he'd been practisin' some. It were Pearsall's ante, an' he made it a dollar to play. The first stranger, he were a little cross-eyed man, he come in, an' the other feller raised it two dollars. Jake he made good, takin' three dollars, an' Sam he raised it five. Then the cross-eyed man made it five more to play, an' the other one stayed, an' Jake called for a sight for his pile.

"Sam took two cards an' the cross-eyed man took one. The next man took two, an' Jake took two. Well, they all filled. Sam made a full, the cross-eyed man filled a flush, though it wa'n't the straight flush he were after; the next man made a seven full, Sam's bein' nines, an' Jake caught a fourth deuce.

"O' course, all the bettin' was amongst



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the other three, Jake on'y havin' a show for the twenty-four dollars his six called for, but Sam raked in considerable over a hundred on the show-down.

"The next pot were a jack on the fours, an' Sam made it five dollars to play. Neither one o' the strangers opened, so it were up to Jake, an' he busted it for nineteen dollars, bein' his pile. Sam stayed out an' the cross-eyed man came in, but he failed to fill, an' Jake was on velvet with forty-eight dollars in front of him, havin' opened on two jacks.

"There was nothin' doin' on the next deal, so that made it a dollar jack, an' Jake's first say. He opened it again for the size o' the pot an' got h'isted twice, so it cost him twenty more to play. When it come to the draw, he said he reckoned he'd split his openers, an' he laid aside a queen, holdin' up four spades.

"Well, that made a rippin' good pot, for he filled his flush an' bet all he had before he looked at his draw. Just naturally, Pear-sall an' the cross-eyed man both saw the bet,

Sam havin' three aces an' the other man three kings.

"By this time they was all gettin' pretty sore to think they'd let Jake in with his seven dollars, but it were too late to kick, an' when it come his deal again, as it were, the next hand, I says to myself that I'd just about make up my mind accordin' to what he did with the cards. If he was to lose, I'd consider it a streak o' luck that he'd been havin', but if he was to deal 'em as well as he had afore, I'd conclude that he was a-learnin' the game.

"Well, after that deal was over, I never had no more doubts about Winterbottom. O' course, havin' as much money as he had to play with, 'twan't necessary nor proper to look after Sam's interest in the pot, so he didn't deal Sam nothin', but he gave the cross-eyed man three aces an' the other feller a pat straight, takin' care to have a seven spot handy when it would just fit into his sevens up on the draw. An' the bettin' just come so's't he had a chance to give the sec-



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ond raise an' he scooped about a hundred an' forty dollars on that pot.

"That left him winnin' tol'able near all there was on the table; but the two strangers they both dug, an' Sam stayed along with about thirty dollars that he had left, an' the game went on.

"But, Lord bless ye, them fellers didn't have no show. They couldn't win, no matter what they did, an' the game broke up in about twenty minutes, with Pearsall forty dollars ahead, an' Jake winnin' all the other money in sight.

"I ast him about it next day an' he told me that he'd been a-studyin' the game all the time since he'd first begun to play, an' the way he sized it up it were no use for a man to bet on any cards unless he had a pretty good notion what was out against him. 'Some fellers seems to know it by instinct,' he says, 'an' some has luck, but I never had no luck to speak of, an' when I come to tryin' to judge of another man's cards by instinct, I didn't never seem to strike it right, so I made up my mind that the on'y thing for

me to do was to study the cards an' get so's't I c'd tell 'em by the feelin'. It takes a heap o' work learnin', but I worked, an' if I do say it, Greenhut, I don't reckon there's any man on the river that can come nearer'n I can to tellin' what cards is out, specially when I've dealt 'em.'

"Well, just naturally, a man with such talents as that ain't a-goin' to have his light hid under no bushel basket not for very long. The boys reco'nized his talents as quick as I did, an' there ain't no man in Arkansas City as is more respected an' more thought of than Jake is. The best of it is that he's square an' don't never play it low down on the home talent. But when it comes to a difficult proposition, such as sometimes has to be tackled when there's a couple o' clever strangers in town, I never feel safe without thinkin' Jake Winterbottom is in the game. An' if he is, why, the strangers don't never get away with no alarmin' amount of Arkansas City money."



XX

KENNEY'S ROYAL FLUSH

"It's a most surprisin' thing," said old man Greenhut as he set the bottles away behind the bar, "that folks don't seem to 'preciate the importance o' bein' persistent. Now, that there Si Walker, 't just come in here an' took a drink an' went out 'thout sayin' a word to no one, is a bright an' shinin' example o' never doin' nothin' worth while, 'cause he don't never stick to it. Gits discouraged like an' sets down an' thinks about it, when if he'd on'y spit on his hands an' take a fresh grip he mought come out a four-time winner. Why, I tell you that man might 'a' been a justice o' the peace an' married the Widow Baker with four hundred acres o' good farm land, no end o' stock an' utensils, an' money in the bank, on'y fer that fatal habit o' his o' not stickin' to it. Just give up, he did, 'cause he got beat out in two

'lections an' wouldn't run fer office no more, an' when the widow said no three or four times, he 'lowed she didn't want him an' got out o' the game, when the blame fool'd oughter knowed that all she wanted was a man with gumption enough to keep on courtin'."

The old man turned his back for a moment, while he slyly poured a little water into a whiskey bottle in which the liquor was running low, and then placing it with the other bottles he came out to his favourite seat by the window and sat smoking for some minutes.

"Beats all," he said, after awhile, "how folks lets go like that. Don't seem to have no sense o' religion. The Good Book says, 'Go to the ant,' you sluggers. Consider her ways and be wise. Now, there ain't no p'int about a ant that's worth considerin', 'cept their almighty stick-to-it-iveness. Stands to reason, it means fer us to keep peggin' away till we git there. 'F Si Walker'd on'y pegged like the ants does, he mought 'a' been rich an' respected,



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"There was Pete Kenney that dropped off'n a boat here some thirty year ago an' just stayed. There didn't seem to be no reason why he should 'a' come here in the first place, or why he should 'a' stayed after he arrove, but he did. Some said he must 'a' dropped on to the boat by accident somewhere up the river, an' the captain put him off at the first landin', him not havin' the regulation fare in his jeans. However 'twas, he come, an' he remained. More'n that, he's well fixed now an' pays taxes.

"There warn't no reason fer it, fer as anybody could see, 'ceptin' Pete's all-fired persistency. He was a bright enough sort o' man an' might 'a' settled down in business fer himself, fer he got a job as bartender down to the hotel an' made money. They do say as how a steady, industrious bartender in a hotel where there's a good run o' business an' a boss that drinks some himself, can have a saloon of his own in a few years, an' I reckon it's pretty near true. I kept bar in a hotel myself when I was young.

"That wa'n't Pete's lay, though. Pete

used to say that there was one way of establishin' yourself in life that laid over any other, an' that was to hold a royal flush in a good stiff game o' draw-poker. Then, he says, it's on'y a question o' how much the others has got to inspire their confidence, an' how much they has to bet with that fixes the amount to be gathered in, so's't a man can retire an' be respectable fer the rest of his natural life.

"Some on us reasoned with Pete at times about this. We told him that royal flushes was sca'ce game, an' that four of a kind was good enough fer a careful player to get rich on, but Pete 'lowed that a royal flush was the on'y thing a man could be dead sure of. Seems he'd had four queens beat when he was young, an' he'd l'arned consid'able caution from th' experience.

"'As to a royal flush bein' sca'ce,' Pete says, 'it stands to reason that a man's goin' to get it sometime, if he plays long enough. Stick to it,' he says, 'an' sooner or later yer goin' to git a royal flush. The on'y thing needed is to stick to it.'




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"Consequences was that Pete, havin' found his theory of business success, devoted himself to the workin' on it out, with a persistency that would 'a' growed wool on a nigger's heel 'f he'd devoted hisself to that particular form of effort. Why, Pete'd give his nights an' days to poker. He never allowed business to interfere with a game, long's he'd money to play with.

"Just naturally his theory of the game interfered with his general success. Mostly it does interfere, I've noticed, when a man gets theories in his head an' plays the game different f'm the ordinary run o' people. These here sharps that figgers out some particular thing in the game as bein' a dead certainty, always loses money on it, for you can say what you like about the great American game, but it certainly does beat anything else for the preponderance of uncertainty that has to be calculated on, whenever you have a dead sure thing in your mind — all excepting a royal flush, as Pete used to say with ondeniable wisdom.

"Pete's mind bein' fixed, so to speak, on



that royal flush, you can see for yourself that it warped his judgment on the question o' drawin' cards. Many a time I've seen him split a pair of aces, an' draw three cards to a ace an' queen, or ace an' ten o' the same suit. Once I even seen him split two pairs, aces an' queens, an' draw two cards to the ace, queen an' jack o' diamonds, an' Joe Hooker says he seen the blamed ijjit split three kings to draw to three hearts just because they was court cards o' the same suit. An' the first card he picked up in the draw was the fourth king. Shows how a man'll overlook the blessin's o' Providence right in his fist, reachin' out after things he hain't no reason to hope for in the natural course of events. Stands to reason a man'll lose money defyin' fate with such monkey-shines as them.

"'Twasn't no use to argue with Pete, though. He were as obstinate as a mule an' stuck to his notion o' gettin' a royal flush like a sick nigger sticks to the Methodist Church. You couldn't persuade him. One day I says to him, 'Look a' here, Pete, a royal flush is most unquestionably a good piece o' property,

but what show hev you got o' gettin' one. You put me out o' patience. Look at the pots you might 'a' scooped with two pairs an' three of a kind if you'd only drawd like a Christian,' says I, 'instead o' puttin' your trust in strange gods, an' sacrificin' your good chips an' the principles o' the game in a strange an' foolish endeavour. It's flyin' in the face o' Providence,' I says to him, 'an' you'll go down to your grave unhonoured, unwept, an' unhung if you persist in it. More'n that,' I says, 'you'll be dead broke all the days o' your life.'

"But you couldn't convince him. 'There's four royal flushes in the deck, ain't there?' says he, 'an' them five cards is just as likely to come as any other five, ain't they? An' if there's anything certain in this here world o' trouble an' oncertainty, 'tis that a man'll get 'em sometime, if he keeps on tryin'. An' say! When I do get 'em if the Lord spares me till that happy day, I won't do anything but swat the gang.'

"'The Lord can spare you easy enough,' says I, disgusted, 'an' so can the community

if you go on tryin' to break up our national institutions by propagatin' sich revolutionary idees. It's worse'n anarchy,' I says. 'It's ridiculous.'

"But there wa'n't no movin' of him, an' we just had to leave him to the error of his ways, an' what we thought was the inevitable vengeance of heaven. An' the boys calculated that bein' as how he was a self-app'inted vessel o' wrath, an' bound to be skinned in the game as long as he continnered to play it, it was a sort o' missionary work to assist in the skinnin'. Most of 'em devoted themselves to the missionary work, too, with such holy zeal that Pete was broke most of the time.

"He was good grit, though. Nobody never heard him complain, for he seemed to be sustained by a calm confidence in that royal flush, an' every time he went broke he'd go back to work as chipper as a catfish an' stick to it till he had a stake to sit into the game with.

"That was another thing I used to talk to him about, while I was trying to show him the error of his ways. 'Supposin' you do get

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a royal flush sometime,' I says, ' how can you expect to get a legitimate profit out of it, if you go broke all the time trying to get it? You won't have no money to bet with,' I says.

" But all he ever said to that was, ' Oh! the Lord will provide. You don't suppose things is goin' to be so ordered, do ye, that heaven's richest blessin' would come to a man, an' him not have the means to back it up? ' Which was next door to blasphemy as I told him frequent, but he on'y smiled. An' when the time come, as it did finally, when his faith was justified, an' he reaped the reward o' persistency, it were developed that he had good reason to smile, for he had provided for that there contingency with a wisdom compared to which the guile o' the sarpent was as the babblings o' babes an' sucklin's. Oh! Pete was a polished article even if we did size him up for a deluded fanatic all them years.

" It went on for a matter o' fifteen year or more, an' Pete's royal flush come to be a standin' joke in town. Fellers would laugh about it every time he set into a game, an' it

were esteemed a great piece o' wit for some feller to say, 'I'll bet a thousand to one in town lots that Pete won't get a royal flush to-night.' 'Course, nobody ever took it up, but everybody'd laugh, an' Pete would laugh with 'em, for he was good-natured, an' he'd say, 'I'll get it sometime, boys, if I don't to-night.'

"An' he did. If ever a man won success by long-continued, persistent strugglin' for it, Pete Kenney did, an' things fell out about as he'd always said they would. It were a pretty good game from the first, for there was a couple o' crossroads gamblers who'd come to town lookin' for blood, an' it happened that there was two planters just back from New Orleans with their crop money in their pockets, an' they was lookin' for excitement. One of 'em knowed Pete an' liked him an' ast him to join in the game that was started just about the time they got off at Arkansas City here, an' Pete havin' a hundred in his clothes, just naturally did.

"He played lucky from the start. It happened, fortunately, that he didn't get a



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chance to make one of his fool draws more'n once in half an hour or so, an' as his play outside o' that was fairly good he managed to scoop in some rattlin' good pots on flushes an' fulls, besides two or three that he took in on deuces and nerve, or some sich hand.

"Anyhow, he had near a thousand in front of him when there come a big jack-pot with fifty in it before it was opened. Pete sat next to the dealer an' he passed, havin' on'y a king, jack, an' ten o' clubs, an', o' course, not bein' permitted to open under the rules. The next man opened it for fifty, the next three come in, an' Pete raised it a hundred. That was his fool play. Whenever he'd see a show for a royal flush he used to play as if he had it, for fear he wouldn't get the good of it when it did come.

"Well, it worked pretty well. One of the crossroads professionals dropped out, but the other one had a seven full, pat, an' after the two planters had come in, he raised Pete another hundred. Pete came back at him with another and one of the planters dropped. The other had a four flush and he stayed.

The gambler, for some reason, didn't raise again, but simply saw the raise, and there was thirteen hundred dollars in the pot.

"In the draw Pete got the ace an' queen o' clubs. I suppose if I'd a caught them cards under the circumstances, I'd a dropped dead, but Pete never turned a hair. There was al'ays a kind of a drop to the left side of his face an' it looked a little droopier than usual, for a minute, but he gave no other sign, and the others thought he had three of a kind at the most. The planter filled his flush, an' so Pete had two good hands to play against, which was as much as anybody could expect. He had about six hundred on the table to bet with, besides, and more'n that, he had resources that nobody at the table knew about.

"The planter sat next to the opener, who dropped out, and as it was his first bet and he had a flush, he pushed up a hundred, not carin' to go too heavy against the gambler who had stood pat and who had stood the third raise before the draw. The gambler raised, of course, pushin' up three-fifty.

"Things was a-goin' Pete's way, but he

never grinned. What he had to do was to make the others think he was bluffing, so he studies his cards careful for awhile an' then says, sort o' desperate-like an' sudden, 'I'll see that, an' I'll go you two-fifty better,' an' he pushes his pile to the middle of the table, barrin' fifteen or twenty dollars he had in loose change.

"The planter's flush was king high, so he saw it, but didn't raise, an' the gambler raised it five hundred, thinking that Pete would drop out. 'That's more than your threes are worth, I reckon,' he said, with a sneer, but Pete never answered him. He studied his cards awhile longer and then said, pretty slow, 'I haven't got the cash to see you, but I've got the deeds to some property here that's pretty valuable, an' if you'll take that for security, I'll raise you a thousand.'

"He pulled some law papers out of his pocket as he spoke and laid them on the table, but the gambler spoke up, very nasty, an' says: 'I ain't buyin' no property without

looking at it, an' money is the on'y thing that talks in this game.'

"Pete looked at the planter, but he shook his head. 'I wouldn't mind as far as I am concerned,' he said, 'but there is an objection made. I don't see how I can help you.'

"'Very well,' says Pete, pretending to look troubled, 'then I'll have to ask for a few minutes' time till I can get some money to play with. Sam,' he says to the nigger that was bringing them drinks, 'take these papers over to Mr. Stevens an' ask him if he will loan me ten thousand dollars on them.'

"Then there was a little wrangle. The other gambler who had dropped out objected to the delay, but the two planters spoke up for Pete and the gambler who held the full house said he was willin' to wait while the gentleman got some more money, as he was goin' to win it anyhow, so Sam went over to Mr. Stevens's house. Stevens bein' the president of our bank an' a gentleman with proper sporting habits.

"Some of us that was lookin' on was guessin' for fair. We never knowed o' Pete



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havin' no property, an' we thought he was bluffin', but we couldn't see just how he reckoned he could work it, or what he expected to do. I says to myself, 'I reckon he's caught that royal flush, but what this move means is more'n I know.' Anyhow, there warn't nothin' to do but wait, an' I waited as all the others did, for it looked as if there'd be some fun.

"Pretty soon Mr. Stevens came back with the nigger, an' says, 'What's this mean, Pete? The nigger says you want to borrow ten thousand dollars.'

"'Yes, I do,' says Pete.

"'Well,' says Stevens, 'you can have the money on these deeds, of course, if you'll come to the bank to-morrow, but you —'

"'I want it now,' says Pete, interruptin', an' as he spoke he picked up his cards from the table where they had been lying, an' holdin' 'em kind o' careless, just so that Stevens could see 'em, but pretendin' not to notice that they could be seen.

"'Oh!' says Stevens, 'you want the money

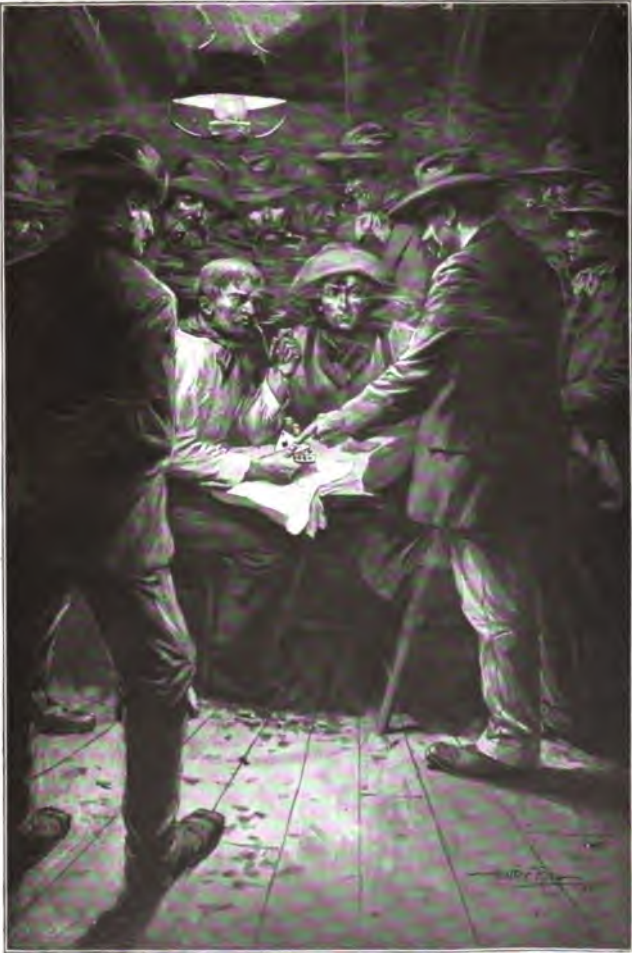
to play with, do you? But certainly you ain't goin' to bet on that hand?'

" 'You'll oblige me,' says Pete, pretendin' to get in a terrible rage, 'by sayin' nothin' about my hand. It may not be the strongest hand in the deck, but it's the best one out. Besides, it's my own business what I do with the money. The question is whether you'll let me have it.'

" 'Oh, yes,' says Stevens, 'I'll let you have it, all right. That is, I'll give you my personal check.'

" 'I reckon that's good,' says Pete, an' so it was, for everybody on the river knowed Stevens.

" 'It was the neatest play I ever expect to see, for them papers wasn't worth the ink that was on 'em. It seems that Stevens had come to know about Pete always playin' for a royal flush, an' had joked him about it, knowin' Pete pretty well an' likin' him as a man gets to like a bartender that treats him right, an' Pete had got him to promise to lend him all the money he needed to play with, whenever he should get the royal flush.



“‘BUT CERTAINLY YOU AIN’T GOIN’ TO BET ON THAT
HAND?’”





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Then when Stevens came over to lend him the money if he really had the cards, him knowin' that the deeds was a bluff, he was sport enough and liked Pete well enough to help him along with his little remark about not betting on that hand.

"Of course, when they heard that, the other players thought sure he was bluffing, an' Pete coaxed 'em along till he cleaned up \$18,000. Then he invested the money, an', as I said, become a respectable taxpayer. It all shows what a man can do by stickin' to what he has to do in this world."

THE END.

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